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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[ROSALIND! ROSALIND!] SCREAMED THE TERRIFIED GIRL, "HELP ME! HELP ME!"

## ROSALIND'S VOW.

### CHAPTER IV.

HIS KENNETH.

WITHOUT a word Claud lifted the girl's lithe young figure, and carried her bodily into the studio, where he made her drink a glass of water, and watched her anxiously until a faint, wild-rose tint drifted slowly into her cheeks, and assured him that she was recovering from her fear.

"What frightened you?" he asked, as he knelt at her feet, while she remained in the big arm-chair to which he had borne her.

She looked at him in surprise.

"That face—that dreadful face! Surely you saw it?"

"I saw no face but yours," he answered, although, as he spoke, his eyes grew shadowed by an indefinable fear, and he looked apprehensively round as if to make sure they were alone.

"Was it only that which startled you?"

"That, and the screams that followed.

You must have heard it—it is impossible I could have been the victim of a delusion!"

"I heard the scream," he admitted, slowly; "but it did not alarm me to any great extent, because it is capable of a perfectly natural explanation. There is a nest of owls in the chimney of that room, and I often hear them making the most eerie noises. Doubtless one was disturbed by our entrance, and the result was the shriek that so frightened you."

Edith shook her head, and rose from her chair. What he said *might* be true; but she could not bring herself to believe it, and she felt in no mood to argue the matter. Her own desire now was to get out of this horrible house.

"Let us go downstairs again," she said, with trembling haste; "we will talk of this matter another time. I am too unhungry to do so now."

He rose at once, and opened the door for her to pass through; but as she went out he laid a detaining hand on her shoulder.

"Miss Charlton, may I ask a great favour of you?"

"Certainly," she answered, a little surprised at his tone, which was strangely eager.

"It is, then, that you will not mention to anyone what has taken place this afternoon—not even to your father. I feel I am taking advantage of you in asking this, but—circumstances are too strong for me, and force me to it against my will. May I depend on your silence?"

She gave the required promise without hesitation, and it was not till afterwards—when she and the Squire were driving home—wards—that it struck her as strange Claud should have exacted it.

Not that she blamed him for it; the interest she felt in him would not admit of blame, for to her he was already the embodiment of all that was highest, noblest, most admirable in manhood, and she could have hugged the Squire when he said,—

"Nice sort of fellow, that Stuart—a gentleman from head to heel. Wonder what the mother's like, and why she keeps so carefully out of the way; for, of course, she was in the house all the time we were there? A screw loose somewhere, I'm afraid!"

This seemed to be the general opinion in the neighbourhood regarding the Cedars and its new inhabitants.

The Vicar, and one or two other people called, but they all met with the same response—namely, that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Stuart received guests in consequence of the delicate health of the latter.

The excuse might be a valid one; but it was not on the whole satisfactory, for why should the mother's delicate health prevent the son from going out? And, again, surely the damp and unhealthy position of the Cedars made it the last place an invalid should choose as a home!

Altogether it was strange, and people looked askance when the Stuaris' name was mentioned. Odd rumours began to float about. How they originated it was impossible to say, but there they were, and each day that passed saw something added to them.

Squire Charlton, who had taken a great fancy to Claud Stuart, laughed aloud at the gossip, and declared that, at any rate, the young man was a very good fellow, and would always be welcome at Crowthorne. Stuart, however, seemed to shrink from accepting the invitation, and it was only by accident that he and the Charltons met.

It is true these "accidents" happened pretty often, for Edith was in the habit of going for long walks; and as Claud was very frequently out sketching, it followed, as a matter of course, that they should often come across each other.

Miss Grant generally accompanied the young girl, but she had a trick of detaching herself from the other two, and leaving them *tête-à-tête* together, while she went off in search of some wonderful wild flower that she was anxious to discover.

"Do you know," she said, one day to Edith, "I want to look over Kings Royal. Could we not manage a little picnic there to-morrow?"

Edith clapped her hands with pleasure. "It would be delightful! Let us go, by all means." Then her face suddenly fell and she added, in an altered voice, "Did we not tell Mr. Stuart we would be in the Bramley wood, to-morrow morning? He promised to show us his sketches of Venice!"

"We can meet him, and take him with us," replied Rosalind, stealing a glance at her companion from under her long lashes, and Edith's face cleared at once at the suggestion.

"That is, supposing he is willing to come!" she said, archly.

"There is no fear about that!" was Miss Grant's quiet rejoinder; and the event proved her right, for Claud accepted with alacrity the invitation to accompany them, and immediately took possession of the basket they had brought with them, which contained their luncheon.

It was a lovely day, the sun pouring down a lavish flood of golden sunshine, the sky cloudless, and the colour of azure. A soft breeze tempered the heat, and sent wavering lines of silvery shadow across the tall green wheat, amongst which poppies were making brilliant patches of vivid scarlet.

Edith's spirits were childishly bright, and even Claud caught the infection of her laughter, and declared he felt like a lad just let loose from school.

"I will forget that I am old," he said—he and Edith were walking alone under the avenues of trees leading up to Kings Royal, while Rosalind loitered behind. "For just one day I will be a boy again."

"Old!" the girl repeated, with gay mockery. "Why, I shall call myself old next, and Rosalind will feel herself quite patriarchal!"

"One should not measure age by years, but by experience," he said, a little sadly, "and my experience has taken my youth from me."

There was something very pathetic in his tone, and Edith at once grew serious. The

great charm of the girl lay in her wonderfully sympathetic nature—she had the faculty of thoroughly identifying herself with the sorrows or joys of her companion of the minute.

"You mean you have had troubles?" she said, softly.

"Great troubles—troubles so bitter that I am even debarred from telling them."

"But they are over now, I hope?"

"Over!" he groaned. "I wish to Heaven they were. No, I fear they will cling to me as long as I live. But it is right—it is just. Sin must ever bring its own retribution."

Edith looked startled. He had said the last words with the air of one who speaks rather to himself than to a listener, and after they were spoken he remained silent for some moments. Then, with an effort, he roused himself.

"I am not keeping my word, am I?" he said, with a wistful smile. "You must help me—to forget."

"I wish it were in my power to help you," she returned, simply. "I would give a great deal to be able to do it."

She held out her hand as she spoke, and he took it in his, and raised it to his lips. Both were unconscious that there was anything out of the common in the action; but Rosalind who was behind, and who saw it, smiled her own peculiar smile, which might have meant satire or satisfaction, or half-a-dozen other things.

Kings Royal was the show place of the county, and the county had good reason to be proud of it, for it was indeed one of those "stately homes of England," the like of which no other country can boast.

Edith, who had known it from childhood, undertook to conduct the others over it, and as she was a privileged person, the old housekeeper smilingly let her have her way. The rooms were truly magnificent, and full of rare pictures, costly statues, marble from Italy, trophies from India, strange monsters from Japan—indeed, all the world seemed to have contributed to their adornment.

Luncheon was eaten under the spreading branches of a chestnut, through whose leaves the sunlight made its way in little golden shafts and arrows.

It was a very simple meal—a chicken, a salad, home-made bread, golden butter, and some rich, ripe strawberries, but for two of the young people it meant Elysium.

Claud had quite recovered his spirits, and he and Edith exchanged merry jests and bright repartees, and seemed to yield themselves entirely to the spirit of the moment.

Rosalind alone was silent, and took an early opportunity of withdrawing and re-entering the house, where she wandered through the grand old rooms, pausing to look at the painted glories of a wonderful Gothic window, on which appeared the crest and arms of the Hawthreys, and those of the noble houses into which they had married.

"A proud name, and a proud race!" she muttered, aloud, and it so chanced that Mrs. Vale, the old housekeeper, happened to be behind her, and overheard the remark.

"You are right, miss," she returned, with emphasis. "The Hawthreys are a proud race, and Sir Kenneth, who is the last of the line, is one of the proudest of them all."

Rosalind turned to her with sudden interest.

"If anything happened to Sir Kenneth to whom would the title go?"

"It would be extinct, miss, for he has no near relations. But," added the housekeeper, "there's no danger of that, for Sir Kenneth has every intention of marrying. All the world knows that Miss Charlton is to be our future lady."

Rosalind made no further comment, but, by dint of a few questions, she cleverly contrived to make the housekeeper talk very freely and openly of Sir Kenneth Hawthrey and his history.

"One of the noblest men and best masters

that ever lived!" Mrs. Vale exclaimed, enthusiastically, in conclusion, and her hearer turned away, with an ominous flashing of the dark eyes, as if she did not altogether agree with the verdict thus pronounced.

She was glad that domestic duties called the housekeeper downstairs; and, when she was alone, she walked through the rooms with the assured step of one who is familiar with the ground she is treading on, and finally made her way to one of the smallest of the upper chambers—a sitting-room, communicating with a bed and dressing-room.

Here she paused and looked round, letting her eyes rest slowly on each picture, each article of furniture, each bit of faded chintz. Her hands clasped themselves together with vehement feeling, her passionate eyes grew more and more sombre, the scarlet lips quivered with hardly suppressed emotion.

"It is all the same, nothing is changed," she murmured to herself. "There is the little bookcase; there is the mirror in its old place—relics of the wretched, wretched past! Will it ever be avenged, I wonder—will it, will it?"

Her agitation grew too strong to be borne, and, throwing herself on her knees, she let her head fall on the cushions of a couch drawn up close to the window; and great anguished sobs escaped her breast—sobs so violent that they seemed as if they must tear the delicate frame in pieces.

It was at this moment the door was opened, and a man stood on the threshold, held speechless by the sight that met his gaze. He was a man who, wherever he went, or under whatever circumstances he might be seen, must inevitably attract instant attention—tall, dark, bronzed by tropical sun, and with that indescribable air which bespeaks long descent from a line of noble ancestors.

He waited for a few seconds before he made a step forward, but alight as his movement was the girl heard it, and sprang to her feet, a burning flame drying up the tears on her cheeks, her eyes gleaming like two dark stars.

"How dare you intrude—!" she began; then her voice died away in a whisper, her hands fell empty to her side, all the colour faded from her cheeks. "You are Sir Kenneth himself!" she murmured, hardly above her breath.

He bowed, looking, as he felt, entirely at a disadvantage.

"I am Sir Kenneth Hawthrey—yes!"

She moved towards him, and then came to a standstill, and for the space of ten heartbeats they looked at each other—fully in the face. The expression in her eyes startled him, it looked so like hate! And yet it was impossible that such could be the case, for, to the best of his belief, this was the first time they had met; and how could a woman, who was a perfect stranger, conceive so violent an aversion for him?

Directly afterwards he felt sure he must have been mistaken. The long thick lashes veiled the flashing splendour of her eyes, and he had time to wonder at her marvellous beauty as she stood before him, clothed in some thick white stuff that fell in straight folds to her feet, and yet showed off, in their full perfection, the grand curves of a form that nature and health had combined to make perfect.

So Cleopatra might have looked ere the scarlet passion fruit had touched her lips, or Zenobia, in the first flush of her loveliness, as she stood beneath the palms of eastern skies, with the diadem of queenly sovereignty flashing round her brow!

## CHAPTER V.

WHICH SHALL IT BE?

WITH a perfectly quiet and natural manner, Rosalind explained how it was she came to be at Kings Royal, and, as she concluded, looked up at Sir Kenneth with a deprecating smile.

"The long walk, and the heat had been too much for me, and made me feel hysterical,"



she added. "Doubtless you will think me very foolish, but women are not strong like men, you must remember, and require far greater indulgences for their weaknesses."

"I owe you an apology for my intrusion," he returned, with a low bow. "Of course I was unaware of your presence, or I should not have come in. I have returned somewhat unexpectedly. I let myself in through a side door of which I always carry the key, and as yet no one in the house knows of my arrival."

"You have not seen Miss Charlton, then?"

"No. But I am very anxious to do so."

Rosalind led the way downstairs, and into the grounds, Sir Kenneth following. Edith and Claud were still in their old places under the chestnut tree, she sitting close against the trunk, while he lay at her feet, looking up into her blue eyes as he talked to her.

The picture was a pretty one, carrying with it its own interpretation, but if it displeased the Baronet he did not say so, and he was far too much master of his emotions to let his face betray the least symptom of annoyance.

Edith was perceptibly startled when she saw him, and sprang to her feet, growing first red and then pale, as if she had been caught in the commission of a guilty act.

"You must let me congratulate you on the change time has made in you!" he said, as he held her hand. "The years that have passed since we met have been kinder to you than to me. I said good-bye to a child—I greet a woman!"

Rosalind could but admire his perfect *savoir faire*, for she saw the otherwise inane compliment was uttered solely for the purpose of putting Edith at her ease.

Fortunately, it had the desired effect, and the young girl resumed her usual manner; although during the rest of the day she was a good deal quieter than she had been in the morning.

Sir Kenneth asked permission to join the picnic party, and his presence was decidedly a boon. There is an awkward number for a picnic, but four is perfection. Naturally enough they paired off into couples—Edith and Claud leading the way through the park, Rosalind and the Baronet following.

Afterwards, when they were all walking towards Crowthorne, this order was reversed, and Sir Kenneth contrived to have Edith for a companion.

"Papa will be so surprised to see you," the young girl said, rather nervously. "He had no idea you would be home for another week or two!"

"Perhaps he won't be quite so surprised as you think," rejoined Sir Kenneth, with a meaning smile. "As a matter of fact, I wrote to him a day or two ago, saying that he might expect me at any moment."

"You did! Why, he never said a word to me about it!"

"Probably not. Indeed, I asked him not to do so."

"Why did you ask him?"

"Because I wished to take you by surprise. I think I succeeded."

Edith looked miserably conscious, and there was just the suspicion of a smile in the Baronet's eyes as they rested on her face.

He had told her she was now a woman, but after all, he was inclined to believe himself mistaken, and to think that although the years had given her womanly graces, they had not taken away the childish simplicity that he had formerly found so charming.

"I want you to tell me something about Miss Grant," he said, taking pity on her embarrassment and changing the subject. "She is quite different from the person I was prepared to find. Your father had mentioned in one of his letters that he had procured a companion for you, but I fancied she must be an old, not a young lady!"

Edith laughed heartily.

"We were all taken in in the same way; and papa has never got over a sense of injury at the mistake. Not that he does not like

Rosalind, but I don't think he quite understands her."

"And do you understand her?"

"I am not quite sure. Sometimes I think I do, and sometimes I feel sure I don't. She varies so. One day she will be full of life and spirits, and the next moody, gloomy, and depressed. I think she must have had some great sorrow, which she won't speak about, but which has left a lasting impression on her!"

Sir Kenneth's presence at Kings Royal made a great difference to the inhabitants of Crowthorne Manor, for a good deal of his time was spent there; and, besides this, he organized all sorts of rides, drives, and various expeditions for the employment of the two girls—for Rosalind went wherever Edith did, and it not unfrequently happened that Claud Stuart joined the trio.

The Squire looked on well-satisfied. So long as Sir Kenneth and Edith were together, he did not mind.

He was not a very far-seeing man; and, having made up his mind that his daughter was to be the future Lady Hawtreys, he had no doubt that Providence would help to put his design into execution. That there was any danger of the wrong couples falling in love with each other did not strike him; and, luckily for his peace of mind, he was not by to see how often Claud and Edith were together, and, by consequence, how often the other two were left alone.

Sir Kenneth was interested in Rosalind—not only by reason of her beauty, but because she was an enigma to him, the solution of which seemed to grow more and more difficult each time he met her.

She was rarely the same two days together. Sometimes she would repel his advances to friendship with a cold indifference that would have offended many other men; and, again, she seemed to lay herself out to charm him by all the arts and fascinations of which she was mistress.

Occasionally, too, she lost the cold self-consciousness that usually characterized her, and then she was indeed charming—bright, intelligent, witty, and full of an intense vitality that put Edith's far in the shade.

Whether she really liked the Baronet, neither he nor Edith could say. She was always a ready listener when he spoke of his travels, of the far-off countries he had seen, and the various adventures that had befallen him; but, then, he was an exceptionally good talker, and possessed, in a high degree, the art of interesting his auditors, so that her attention went for little, or nothing at all.

One evening she and Edith happened to be alone in the latter's own sitting-room. The Squire was out, and both girls preferred the cosy little boudoir to the more stately drawing-room.

Edith had been reading by the light of a rose shaded wax candle, but now the book had fallen from her hands, and she sat quiet, lost in thought; while Rosalind sat in the window-seat, looking out at the moonlit landscape.

All in a minute the younger girl sprang up with a loud shriek.

By a careless movement of her arm she had thrown down the candle on her dress, and the flimsy material—it was black lace—had caught fire in an instant.

"Rosalind! Rosalind!" screamed the terrified girl, involuntarily appealing to what she felt to be a strength greater than her own. "Help me! help me!"

Rosalind cast one glance round, then snatched up an Indian shawl that happened to be lying on the couch, and, quick as thought, threw it round Edith, pressing it down with both arms, and with such good effect, that the flames were at once extinguished.

But Edith was very frightened; and even after she knew there was no longer any danger she trembled so violently that Rosalind took her into her arms, soothing her with

loving words, and pressing tender kisses on the pale young face.

The episode showed the companion in quite a new light.

Usually she was quite undemonstrative, and suffered, rather than returned, Edith's caresses; but now it seemed as if the deep wells of tenderness in her nature were all coming to the surface under the influence of poor Edith's recent peril.

"Why, Rosalind!" exclaimed the Squire's daughter, "I really believe you care for me, after all!"

"I care for you very much—how much I can hardly tell you," Rosalind answered. "You have been to me like a sunbeam in a darkened room, the one streak of brightness my lonely life has known."

Then she helped to divest Edith of the charred remains of her frock, and put on her a dressing-gown. Afterwards they both sat at the open window, through which the scent of roses and mignonette came up from the garden below, and the moonbeams fell in a slanting, silver radiance that transmuted into wonderful beauty every object on which it rested.

For some time neither spoke, but remained with their arms twined round each other, silent under the spell of the moonshine. Then Rosalind broke the silence, and her voice was full of deep earnestness.

"Edith, I want to put to you a question, and I implore you to answer it truthfully. It is not from idle curiosity, or any other unworthy motive that I ask it, but I am prompted simply and solely by the desire for your happiness. Darling, do you love Sir Kenneth Hawtreys?"

A subtle change passed over Edith's face, while the faintest possible shiver stirred her limbs. For a moment she seemed undecided, and looked away from the deep, serious gaze of Rosalind's eyes, but the stronger will coerced her, and she told the secret that she had hardly dared confess to her own heart.

"No, I do not love him. I have tried to persuade myself I did, but I have not succeeded."

"And you do not wish to marry him?"

"No, no! A thousand times no!"

Rosalind drew a long deep breath—it might have been of relief.

"Yet another question, Edith. Are you engaged to him?"

"No; but it has been an understood thing for years that we should marry each other. My father will be dreadfully disappointed. I hardly dare think of what he will say when he knows."

"Then you are quite resolved to go against his wishes?"

"I have no alternative. I know," said Edith, rather sorrowfully, "that I am weak and frivolous, and foolish, but I am not wicked enough to marry a man when I don't care for him."

"Especially when you care for someone else—oh, Edith?" Rosalind said, playfully, but she was sorry the moment after she had spoken, for poor Edith, unbunged by the events of the evening, burst into a flood of tears, and the elder girl made all haste to get her to bed, where she soon lost remembrance of her troubles in the deep, dreamless slumber of youth.

But the morrow did not, as it often does, bring forgetfulness; indeed, the conversation of the preceding night had revealed to Edith more fully than anything else her own state of mind. All unused to anxiety as she was it preyed upon her, and its results were visible in her pale cheeks, and altered manner.

Sir Kenneth, whose visits were as constant as ever, questioned her as to her health, but she put him off with evasive replies, and shrank back from him as if he were the last person in the world to whom she would give her confidence.

The Baronet, however, was not a man to be easily turned from his purpose; and, finding he could get no satisfaction from Edith, he applied to Rosalind one afternoon when he found her alone in the garden.

She was seated beneath the sweeping shadow of a copper beech, her slim white fingers employed in winding some wool. The employment suited her. She looked poetical enough for anything in her plain white dress, with a deep hued crimson rose fastened close to her lovely, rounded throat.

"You might be one of the Fates, unwinding the magic reel of Destiny!" he said, smiling, as he seated himself beside her, and Rosalind looked up with the weird, flashing smile he had learned to know.

"Perhaps I am a Fate," she answered. "One of the Eumenides, whose task it is to bring retribution on a well-nigh forgotten sin."

She looked straight up at him as she spoke, and there was something in her gaze that both displeased and disconcerted him.

"How terribly in earnest you seem, Miss Grant!" he said, with a slightly uneasy laugh.

"I am in earnest, Sir Kenneth. Life is, for me, too serious to admit of trifling."

"You are young to speak thus."

"Young!" She repeated the word, scornfully. "I am not young—I never was young—all my youth was crushed out of me before I was even old enough to appreciate what it meant. Other girls have tasted the delights of life, and love, and joy, but for me they are unknown goods."

She spoke passionately—almost fiercely. The wool fell from her fingers, her bosom heaved as if her heart beat so riotously that it became a pain. She had forgotten that her conduct was strange, unconventional—unwomanly even, and just for a moment all restraints were thrown aside, and the woman spoke to the man with as utter a freedom as if there were no social barriers between them.

"The future will redeem the past," he said, softly, his own heart beginning to beat rather quickly in sympathy with her excitement.

"Will it?" She breathed a quick, impatient sigh. "Ah, if I dared to think so!"

"It must—it shall!" he returned, as he took her hand in his and bent towards her—so close that his breath fell hotly on her cheek.

His touch seemed to act like an electric touch on her. She drew back hastily, snatched her hand from his, and blushed a deep carnation as she picked up the fallen wool.

"I'm afraid we have lapsed into the melodramatic, or worse still, sentimental," she said, with a resumption of her usual tone. "I am sure you did not come out here for the purpose of listening to my views on life, Sir Kenneth."

Her composure recalled him to himself, and to a remembrance of his purpose.

"No," he rejoined. "Candidly, I did not, for I wished to speak to you concerning Edith."

Rosalind started slightly, and her fingers trembled a little as they disentangled the wool.

"Yes?" interrogatively.

"She is not looking well—she is pale and thin, and refuses to confess what ails her. There is something preying on her mind—what is it?"

"You ask me!"

"I ask you because you are the most likely person to give me an answer."

"And suppose I am unable to do so?"

"But you are not," he returned, with quiet conviction. "If anyone is in Edith's confidence it is yourself. Besides, even though she has not told you in so many words what ails her, you are quite clever enough to have found it out for yourself."

"And if I had, do you think it would be right of me to betray my friend?"

"I do—because it is for her good. I have known Edith Charlton a good many years, and I would do a good deal to secure her happiness. I have more influence with her father than anyone else, not even excepting herself; and as she has no brother, I wish to take the place of one towards her."

"Of a brother, Sir Kenneth, or husband?"

"At the present moment the former," he answered, though a deep flush showed itself through the tan of his skin. "I see you are aware of the semi-engagement existing between us, and so I can speak to you with greater unreserve. Has this engagement anything to do with Edith's state?"

"Yes—to the best of my belief it has."

"You mean that she finds she does not care enough about me to marry me?"

"That is what I do mean."

She was looking at him steadily as he said this, and it seemed to her that the expression on his face was one of relief.

"Very well," he said, decisively. "I will speak to the Squire without delay, and there shall be no further question of our marriage."

She looked at him curiously, studying every line of his face with intent eagerness.

"But this is surely a great blow to you, Sir Kenneth? You, who have been looking forward for so many years to marrying Edith!"

"No," he said, slowly, and returning her gaze with equal intentness. "It is not so great a blow to me as you would imagine. You see, I am frank with you, Miss Grant."

"But you intended marrying her when you came home?"

"I did, and if I had found that she cared for me I should have married her."

"Even when you discovered you did not love her?"

"Even when I discovered that. My honour was involved, you must remember, Miss Grant."

"And you would have sacrificed your happiness at the shrine of honour?"

He drew himself up proudly, and she was struck anew by his bronzed beauty. He might have been some Crusader of the Middle Ages, standing there in the flower of his strength and manly vigour.

"I would never hesitate between happiness and honour, Miss Grant, if the choice were given me!"

She sighed heavily, and her eyelids drooped; then a faintly scornful smile curved her lips, crimson as the red heart of a pomegranate.

"Perhaps, after all, you *did* love her?"

"No!"

"It is a thing of which no man can never be sure."

"Is it? I thought you told me you knew nothing about love?"

"Neither do I, except what books and hearsay have taught me."

"Bad mentors, Miss Grant! For such knowledge you must go to the Fountain Head."

Was there coquetry in her glance as she looked up at him from the deep velvet shadow of her lashes? It seemed very much like it.

"I cannot, because I don't know the way."

"Then I will be your guide, Rosalind!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### ENGAGED.

AGAIN he took her hand, and this time she did not repulse him.

Had he been less excited, Sir Kenneth might have been conscious of a quickly-suppressed shiver that vibrated through her; but, even if he had observed it, he would naturally have attributed it to the agitation of the moment.

"Listen to me, Rosalind, and then you will learn the token by which I am sure that I no longer care for Edith, except as a friend," his voice shaken with deep emotion. "I love you, dearest! not with a boy's passing fancy, but with the deep, fervent love of a man who has lived for over thirty years! If Edith had shown any symptoms of caring for me I should never have told you this; I should have hidden it in my heart as a secret only to be revealed on the Day of Judgment! But, now that I am quite assured of her indifference, there is no reason why I should not tell it to you, and ask you to be my wife!"

She was silent, and white as a snow wreath. There was no outward sign of the battle that was being fought within her—no token of the fierce warring of passions, each striving equally hard to gain the victory. Only her hand, as it lay in his, grew very cold and heavy, as if the blood had ceased to flow through the blue veins.

"My darling, answer me!" he commanded, in a low tone of loving entreaty, and then she raised her eyes and looked at him.

"You love me—you wish to marry me?"

"Yes."

"Me, of whom you know so little?"

"I know that you are the one woman in the world for me, and that is enough. What more can I want?"

"You know nothing of my family—my friends."

"Not as yet; but doubtless you will tell me all that is necessary later on. Love is not a matter of prudence or calculation, my dear one. It is a concentration of all one's hopes, fears, and desires—one's whole being, in fact, on one object. And for me that object is yourself!"

"I am poor—very poor."

"And I am rich—very rich, so that makes matters equal. Don't you see?"

"I see that it may from your point of view. But people will say you have made a *mesalliance*—they will think you as quixotic as Cophetua when he raised the beggar-maid to his throne."

"Will they? Let them! What do you think it matters to me whether people say these things or not?" He laughed aloud in his scorn, then drew her nearer, and bending down imprinted a gentle kiss on her lips. "There, darling! that is the seal of our betrothal!"

She neither returned nor rejected the kiss, but it was well for him—or bad for him, as the case might be—that the expression of her eyes remained veiled. It would have startled him if he could have seen it, and still more would he have been startled if, half-an-hour later, he could have seen her—lying prone on the carpet in her bedroom, her face white and despairing, her hands uplifted in agonised entreaty as her lips moved in a mute prayer for pardon.

Verily, a stranger betrothal never took place!

Naturally enough Squire Charlton was inclined to be very angry as well as disappointed at the turn affairs had taken. He had looked forward with triumphant certainty to seeing his daughter Sir Kenneth's wife, and the wrench of abandoning this hope was a severe one.

Still, he was wise enough not to cry over spilt milk, so he accepted the position with what grace he might, and it was known in Crowthorne that Sir Kenneth Hawtrey was engaged—not to Edith Charlton, as every one had expected, but to her companion, Miss Grant.

Edith herself was delighted. When Rosalind told her the news, she flung her arms round the companion's neck and kissed her lovingly.

"I am so glad, dear Linda; so very, very glad!" she exclaimed. "You will live at Kings Royal, and be quite near me for the rest of your life!"

Rosalind made no answer, but turned round abruptly, and looked out of the window near which she was standing.

Edith, full of impulsive affection, took the dark face between her hands and forced the brilliant eyes to look into hers.

"You are happy, dearest, are you not?" she queried, anxiously. "You love Sir Kenneth?"

Rosalind laughed uneasily, and laid her fingers lightly over the young girl's mouth, but Edith insisted on an answer, and would not be put off.

"I would rather marry Sir Kenneth than any man in the world. There! Will that



satisfy you?" Rosalind said, at last, with attempted gaiety.

"I suppose it must," Edith returned, but she was not altogether easy in her mind on the subject, and Rosalind often had an uncomfortable suspicion that she was watching her, as though she doubted whether the engagement had brought all the happiness it should have.

Sir Kenneth was a most impatient wooer, and as there was no reason why the marriage should be put off it was fixed to take place at the end of August, and in London.

"I should prefer a very quiet wedding," Rosalind said, one evening, when she and her lover were walking together in the Crowthorne grounds. "Edith must come, I suppose, and her father, but there is no necessity to invite anyone else."

"None of your own friends?"

"I have no friends, as I told you before. My father and mother died when I was little more than a baby, and I have no relatives living."

"Why, you are as lonely as I am!" he exclaimed, pressing the round white arm that was drawn within his own. "Never mind. We must console each other; and, so far as I am concerned, I am quite satisfied, for now I can feel that you are all my own, and no one has the least right to share your love with me."

As he spoke they came to a standstill, and she drew her arm away, so as to lean against a marble pedestal, on which a statue of Diana was placed.

Very fair she looked in the moonlight—fair enough to steal a man's heart, and set his brain on fire with the power of her beauty!

She was dressed in black that night; some thin, diaphanous material, through which the whiteness of her arms and shoulders gleamed like polished marble. On one side of her corsage a bunch of blood-red roses was fastened—one of the flowers had fallen to pieces, and a little shower of crimson petals lay on the white stones of the terrace at her feet.

"My darling, my queen!" the Baronet exclaimed, in a sudden transport of enthusiasm, as he looked at her. "It seems to me that each day, as it passes, intensifies my love for you. How could I have lived without you in the past—how could I live without you in the future?"

No answering rapture came in her face, not even a blush such as his passionate words might well have awakened. She yielded her hand to him passively; then she said, in a very low and earnest tone,—

"Would it really be a very bitter trial to you to lose me?"

"So bitter that I cannot bear to contemplate it—so bitter that death itself would be preferable!"

Her lips parted in a triumphant smile. At that moment she looked like some Eastern queen, to whom word has been brought that her armies had crushed an invading sovereign.

"Why do you ask such a question?" exclaimed the Baronet, in a quick tone of alarm. "Nothing can come to part us—nothing shall!"

"You are uttering a challenge to Fate."

"Am I? Well, I feel as if I could defy Fate itself to take you from me. There is only one thing that could come between us!"

"And that?" She put the question curiously, and as dispassionately as if she had merely been an onlooker, not one of the persons most nearly concerned by the answer.

"The conviction that you loved someone else better than me."

She laughed lightly, even mockingly.

"You may set your mind at rest on that score. I have never cared for any man in my life!"

"Till now," he amended. "And yet you are three-and-twenty, and must have had many admirers who would willingly have become lovers!"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with some impatience. "If you are going to be jealous of my possible lovers—"

"But I am not!" he interrupted, smiling. "Only I feel sure that other men have wished to marry you, and you are so reticent regarding your past that I know nothing about them."

"I might accuse you of the same thing!" swiftly. "Doubtless you have been in love with many women before you met me, but you do not think it worth while confessing it."

She looked at him piercingly, and he coloured a little, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I cannot confess a negative," he said. "I have told you before, and I tell you again, that you are the only woman I have ever really cared for. Fancies I have had, and perhaps some of them might have ripened into love under other conditions, but they never had the chance. Again I say, you are the only one I have ever desired to make my wife."

"But other women have cared for you!" "Have they? Perhaps!" The colour deepened under his dark skin; then he laughed, but the laugh was a little forced. "Surely you will not hold me responsible for that?"

"Why not? If, without caring for her, you encouraged a woman to love you, your sin was worse than if you had loved her—yes, a thousand times worse!"

"Why Rosalind, how bitterly you speak!" he exclaimed, in some surprise; and perhaps he was a little relieved that just then Edith appeared at the other end of the terrace to summon them in to coffee.

Sir Kenneth at once obeyed the summons, but Rosalind, catching sight of the post-boy, who was bringing the evening letters over from Manchester, went to meet him, and took his bundles from him.

She was expecting one or two letters herself, and she had no desire that they should pass through other hands than her own. Yes, there they were, and the rest of the envelopes were directed to the Squire. One of them attracted her attention—a square white envelope with a crest on it. She turned it over and looked at the writing—a man's—and as she saw it, her breath came faster, and her eyes widened into the expression of a hunted animal.

"From Captain Marchant!" she repeated below her breath, and then she made a sudden movement as if she would have torn the letter in pieces. She restrained herself, however, and stood for a few seconds in apparent indecision. "Suppose he should know of my presence here—suppose he should betray me!" she murmured, half frantically. "Then all would be over, and I should be driven away in disgrace. Shall I open the letter and see what it says?"

The temptation was a great one, and required all her efforts to resist it. Finally she overcame it, and walked with quick steps towards the house.

"The letter itself shall decide," she said, as she entered the hall. "If he has betrayed me then I will go, and never see Sir Kenneth again, but if not, I will take it as an omen that success is positive."

Her command over herself was marvellous, for when she went in the drawing-room there was nothing in her demeanour to excite remark, and she even smiled playfully as she gave his letter into the Squire's hands.

"Ah! from Folke Marchant, I see!" he observed, putting on his gold-rimmed glasses. I did not know he was back in London again. I wonder what he has got to say?"

Rosalind wondered too, and seated herself near the Squire, so that she might not miss a word that he said.

"Wants to come down and pay us a visit—says he is tired of town, and should like a spell of the country. Edith, my dear, you had better write and say we shall be delighted to see him."

Rosalind had grown even paler than usual. As it happened no one noticed her. Edith pouted, and seemed annoyed.

"Oh, daddy, what a mistake! I'm sure we don't want anyone visiting here until after the wedding is over."

"Why not write and put the gentleman off until September?" put in Rosalind, softly. "The shooting will give you a good excuse for the delay."

"Yes, daddy, that will be best!"

"It is some time to wait, isn't it?" asked the Squire, dubiously; but he allowed himself to be persuaded, especially as Edith promised to write the letter for him.

As it happened, however, it was Rosalind who wrote, and Edith who copied it; and thinking over the circumstances later on, the latter was slightly surprised that her companion should have offered to dictate a note which she herself could have written with very little trouble.

But Rosalind was a strange girl, and it was useless to attempt to judge her by the standard of ordinary womanhood!

After that the days passed on very swiftly; and it was noticeable that Edith, who had looked much brighter directly after the announcement of Rosalind's engagement, was growing pale and languid again.

For over a month she had seen nothing of Claud Stuart, although she knew he was at home, for once or twice she had caught sight of his figure in the distance, and had fancied that when he saw her he made all haste to get away. There seemed no reason why he should avoid her, and yet, as a matter of fact, he did.

Not even to Rosalind did the young girl confess the secret of her unhappiness; and once, when the former tried to approach the subject, Edith turned the conversation with a haste and decision that showed her determination not to let herself be betrayed into confidences.

She was glad when they all left Crowthorne for London, in order to be ready for the wedding, which was now drawing very near. The change was at least some sort of a distraction, and then there was the excitement of choosing Rosalind's wedding clothes. In this matter, however, the bride-elect was very decided, and her trousseau was of the plainest possible description—such an outfit as a school-girl might have had, or a governess going out to a new situation.

Edith, who would have liked to revel in silks and satins, and laces, was disappointed.

"What does it matter if you are poor now?" she said to her companion. "You will be rich by-and-by, and I am sure you are welcome to my five hundred pounds which my old aunt left me some time ago, and which is lying in the bank doing no good whatever. Besides, you are to be 'my lady,' and you owe it to your future station to get appropriate dresses."

"My dresses will be quite appropriate to my station—never fear!" Rosalind responded, with her strange, gentle smile; and Edith knew it was useless to attempt to urge her more.

At last the wedding day arrived—a day such as one seldom sees in August. Low skies, a heavy oppressive air, a raw cold wind, threatening rain—not a streak of blue in the clouds—not a hope of sunshine anywhere.

"It looks like a bad omen," Edith said to the Squire, when she went downstairs ready dressed for the ceremony, and looking very fair and sweet in a soft pale blue gown, which, however, seemed much too cold for the morning. Rosalind was still in her room, at this, a little while later, Edith went.

The bride-elect was standing in front of the toilet table, wearing her travelling dress of grey cloth. In her hand she held the ivory frame of a hand-glass Sir Kenneth had given her; but the mirror itself had slipped from the frame and lay at her feet, shivered into a hundred fragments.

Surely not an omen of happiness for the future!

(To be continued.)

## WHATEVER IS—IS BEST.

—o—

I know as my life grows older,  
And mine eyes have clearer sight,  
That under each rank wrong somewhere  
There lies the root of right;  
That each sorrow has its purpose,  
By the sorrowing oft unguessed;  
But as sure as the sun brings morning,  
Whatever is—is best.

I know that each sinful action,  
As sure as night brings shade,  
Is somewhere, sometime punished,  
Though the hour be long delayed.  
I know that the soul is aided  
Sometimes by the heart's unrest,  
And to grow means often to suffer,  
But whatever is—is best.

I know there is no error  
In the great supernal plan,  
And all things work together  
For the final good of man.  
And I know when my soul speeds onward  
Its grand eternal quest,  
I shall cry as I look back earthward,  
"Whatever is—is best."

E. W. W.

## MY LADY OF THE LAKE.

—o—

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## AN UNINTENTIONAL CONFESSION.

THE following morning, at nine o'clock, Lord Rangor was ready, and waiting for Dr. Martin, who called at the time appointed for him at the hotel with his fast stepping horse and high dog cart. Nor was this the last time the Earl accompanied him upon his professional round.

At some houses Lord Rangor remained outside in the trap. It was only where he could learn any lesson in the great book of life and human suffering, that the medico asked for his company in the sick room.

Something was very vastly altering Lord Rangor. That something was a good woman's influence; and admiration of the self-denying life-work of one of his own sex.

These two touched fresh chords of thought in his lordship's mind, and brought out new music, such as had never been produced there before; and the poor of M— had good cause to be glad that Lord Rangor had come to their town.

There was little he could do personally, but his wealth could carry comfort, and that he did not spare. But, before he left the neighbourhood, he persuaded his old friend, Lady Dalkeith, to lay the foundation stone for him of the hospital which he called after her adopted name.

It was to be the "Roslyn Hospital," and all orders for it were to be given by her. His part of the work was to provide the funds.

He did not, however, remain to see it built, for, if the truth must be told, Mrs. Roslyn exercised the old influence over him which she had done years before—an influence which he had never wholly shaken off, and which now rendered him uneasy and restless.

Before he left the town she had again begged him to make her daughter's acquaintance, and to assure her of her undying love, and, if possible, to place them in communication with each other.

Poor Lady Dalkeith! Nothing could make up to her for the loss of her only child. Lord Rangor promised all she wished, and the two sat together for the last time before his departure, his lordship's heart too full for many words; while that of Mrs. Roslyn, although animated by altogether different feelings, expressed sincere regret that he was so soon to

leave them, and the good work which he had begun.

This she said to him very kindly, and her speech reminded him of a cheque which he had intended to give her for the poor.

He took his letter case from his pocket, and opening it, his eyes fell upon the photo of the "Gipsy," which he seemed to have almost forgotten.

He drew it from its resting-place and laid it before Mrs. Roslyn.

"Is not that a very beautiful face?" he questioned; "I have seldom seen one more so!"

Mrs. Roslyn regarded it long and earnestly, then raised her eyes with a sudden movement to her friend.

"Yes, she is lovely!" she admitted. "Just what Celestine must have been in her youth. Indeed, the features are strangely like hers. One really might have supposed that she had sat for it."

Lord Rangor started.

The phantom face!

It was this likeness of Madame St. Croix to the Gipsy which had so drawn him to her with such bewilderment as to the reason.

Now he understood it; and he wondered strongly whether this really was the lady about whom Sir Roger Dalkeith had been making inquiries.

It was an awkward thing to ask Sir Roger's wife, and he hesitated to do so; still, he was anxious to find out what he could.

"You never knew Madame St. Croix in England, did you?" he asked at length.

"Oh, no. I doubt if she has ever been there," she answered, readily. "We met for the first time in M——"

"Ah! she was not an acquaintance of your family, then?"

"Certainly not. Moreover, she knows nothing of my history."

A silence fell between them.

Then Lord Rangor spoke again.

"I wish you would casually ask Madame St. Croix whether she ever knew a Mr. Guy Forrester. He is in some way connected with the lady who sat for that picture, I am sure."

"I will go to the study and inquire at once," she returned, rising and preparing to leave the room. "Shall I show her the picture?"

"I think not at present. Time enough for that if she admits that she is acquainted with the gentleman."

"Very well; I shall not be long."

Lord Rangor paced the room slowly in her absence. She was only a little while away, but it seemed an age to him, for, strong though his nerves were, they were strangely at tension.

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Roslyn entered the little room where Celestine carried on her correspondence, and was received with a bright look.

She spoke about one or two letters she wished answered, then said quietly,—

"Lord Rangor has come to say good-bye."

"I will call you before he leaves. We shall all miss him very much. By-the-bye, Celestine, he has been talking of an artist named Forrester—Guy Forrester. You had a little to do with the artistic world once. Did you ever hear of him, ever see him?"

The young widow raised a face of perfect unconcern towards Mrs. Roslyn.

"I don't think I ever heard the name," she said, slowly; "if I did I have quite forgotten; and I certainly never have met him."

The bright eyes met hers fully; there was nothing hidden or concealed, that anyone could see with one glance; and with a sad smile Mrs. Roslyn left her, returning to the drawing-room.

Lord Rangor stopped abruptly in his walk, and they stood face to face.

"Well?" he exclaimed, eagerly.

"Celestine had evidently never heard of him before," she said, quietly.

He gave a sigh of relief.

"I am glad of that. There is something in the man I don't like; I wish I had never known him. I have an instinct that he will do mischief in his generation, and I am glad your poor little companion is out of the reach of his fascinations, for he is a taking fellow, there is no doubt whatever about that; and his talent is undeniable."

A quick glance of fear shot from Mrs. Roslyn's eyes.

"He is not the artist who painted May, I hope?" she said, nervously.

"Unfortunately he is," he returned, sadly.

"And I shall never forgive myself if harm comes of it. It was all my doing his going there; and whatever you may say to me I have but one reply—*Mec culpa*."

How often one bitterly regrets the simplest acts of life, as they seem to us, which prove to be but too terribly important seen by the light of after events. When an idler upon the banks of a lake heedlessly drops in a stone he may as well try to restrain the overwidening circles which slowly, but surely, follow the act, until the waters of the lake are all astir, than attempt to judge the consequences of one single action of this life.

"Oh! Mrs. Roslyn, what will you say to me if in any way I have brought trouble or annoyance to your daughter?"

She held out her hand to him.

"We must not meet troubles half way, old friend. One thing I know, that *intentionally* you would not bring harm to anyone. But since you have a fear for May I am going to ask a very great favour of you."

"It is granted, whatever it may be."

"I wonder that the remembrance of King Herod and Herodias does not prevent men making such rash promises," she returned, with a shade of impatience mingling with amusement. "How do you know that it is possible to grant what I am about to request?"

"I have sufficient confidence in Mrs. Roslyn to know that she would not ask aught which is impossible," he replied, gravely, as he bent over the hand she had given him and kissed it. "You have only to express your wishes, and if any man can carry them out I will do so."

"You are very kind. You have silenced me by your generosity. Still, I am almost afraid to make my request."

"Do not be, I beg."

"What would you think of me if I asked you to give up your tour and to return to England to try and see May, and carry out my wishes?"

"I should say you had in no way overrated my friendship, and that carrying out your wishes would be a far greater pleasure to me than following the plans I had laid out for myself. Any time will do for my tour. I will go straight back to England and do my best to put you in communication with Miss Dalkeith."

Mrs. Roslyn gave a sigh of relief, and a bright smile settled upon her face, as though the rays of the Western sun were shining upon her; but it was only the hope and joy glowing from the earnest heart through the windows of her soul, and lighting up the mobile features of the mother's face. She stretched out both her hands to him.

"Some day I may be able to thank you," she said, brokenly. "I have no words now wherewith to do so. Make May love me, and I shall be grateful to you through all my life."

"She could not fail to do so if she knew you," he replied, moved beyond all self-control.

"Mrs. Roslyn, you will scarcely wonder that I wish to serve you when I tell you I have loved and worshipped you all my manhood, through—" then he stopped suddenly, checked by a very simple action.

Mrs. Roslyn was turning her wedding ring round and round upon her finger, reflectively. Then she looked at him with her clear star-like eyes, innocent of all shyness, or love,—

"You have ever been a real friend to me," she said, "and I have valued your good will, believe me."



"Now that I have spoken, I will not shelter myself under the mistake of your guileless heart," he continued, passionately. "I loved you with the devotion which a man feels for the only woman who has ever touched the depths of his heart."

"Surely not," she returned, more in surprise than anger. "I am very sorry, Lord Rangor, but I never dreamed of it. I am so much older than you are; you have ever seemed a boy to me."

"A boy!" he laughed, a little bitterly. "Why, there is very little difference after all in our ages; but, from what you say, I never had a thought of yours."

"Never in that way."

"And never could have?"

"No, not like that. I have always had a strong regard for you; nothing more. It is better you should know."

"And now, I suppose, you are annoyed by my words. I never meant to tell you this, Mrs. Roslyn, and I am sorry that I have done so."

"Then let us both forget your rash words; rash because, remember, although I am parted from my husband, I am only parted, and owe him my allegiance."

"You are right, and I have been wrong."

"Confession is good for the soul, old friend. We will forget all which savours of unpleasantness, and recollect only the good which has come of our having met again."

"You are a noble woman, Mrs. Roslyn," he said, brokenly, as he pressed the hand she held out to him; "and if there is any good in me at all, it is your influence only which has brought it out."

"Well, I hope you will soon tell me the good news, Lord Rangor, that some gentle lady is going to help you to carry it on," she said, with her kindly smile, which was reflected upon his face, although more earnestly.

"When I meet another woman like yourself, you will hear that, but not before," he replied earnestly. "I can live alone, but I could not bear the companionship of an uncongenial nature; so you are not likely to hear of my marriage."

"Who can tell! Cupid plays strange pranks sometimes, and his winged arrow may fly into your heart when you least expect it. Domestic life would suit you. You appreciate kindness, and would do your best to make your wife happy."

"I would never marry without love, and so I do not expect to marry. But now, good-bye, and may Heaven bless you."

"Good-bye, old friend. I shall long for your news—I mean about May, not the wife this time. Perhaps you may visit Australia again; if so, you will not fail to come and see the working of your own hospital, will you?"

"I don't think I must venture to return," he said, brokenly; "but, remember, the funds are always ready, and my interest in your work will never fade. Write to me, Mrs. Roslyn, and tell me how things get on with you, and now I must go."

"What, without a word to poor little Celestine!" Nay, run to the study, and bid her adieu."

He obeyed her like a man in a dream, and returning, looked into her face once more, clasped her hand, and was gone.

## CHAPTER XL.

CHILD, YES! I WOULD FOR YOUR SAKE!"

Mrs. ROSLYN and her friends quite missed Lord Rangor when he left M—, for his kindly ways had endeared him to them all. He took up the burthen of other people's cares so willingly, and entered into the plans for doing good with a readiness which astonished his old friend, who, knowing the easy, self-indulgent life he had led, scarcely expected it of him, although she had all along maintained that his heart was good at the core.

As to Lord Rangor himself, the itsight into a possible higher state of existence, even

in this world, had been opened up to him, and he left M— a decidedly more thoughtful and earnest man.

He was thoroughly aware that the life he had once led would never suit him again, and yet he did not so far see his way to striking out a line which would satisfy him. He wanted a decided point for which to steer, and all was fog ahead. All he knew clearly was that Mrs. Roslyn in no wise reciprocated the love which he had bestowed upon her, all unknown by her, for so long; that she never had cared for him except as a friend, and never would do so, and he determined to do his best to live down the useless, unwise love which still made his heart thrill, even as he thought of it.

He felt no anger against Mrs. Roslyn as some men would have done. He knew she was right, and he in no way resented her plain speaking. Moreover, he wished to do all he could to prove his sincerity to her, and set out for England without loss of time to carry out her wishes, putting his own pleasures aside for her sake.

The weather they experienced on board the ship was decidedly rough, but Lord Rangor was a good sailor, and reached England none the worse for his long months of absence; for although he had made no tour, according to his intentions, he was not back in England until the following spring, at which time poor May had been nearly a year Guy's wife—and a sad year, indeed, that had been for her.

Not once had she even heard of her husband since that terrible morning when she had walked into the town and learnt his cruelty from his own lips. After that a thick cloud seemed to settle down upon her young life, and close her in, shutting all joy from sight and sound of her. She had no longer a look or a word for the birds or the flowers which had been her companions and her delight. That page of her existence, with her bright days of innocence, were over for ever.

May Dalkeith—May Forrester—would never be a light-hearted child again. Her sweet, mellow voice was heard no more in song, and her soft, shy, fanciful dream of love was over for ever. She painted, occasionally—very occasionally. Sometimes she read aloud to her father, but this was an innovation, a putting aside of the hard-and-fast rules which Sir Roger had laid down for himself and his daughter in the past, and which he now found it difficult to cast aside.

For hours May would sit looking at her mother's picture, and sometimes sadly and wistfully at that of the "Gipsy."

True, Guy Forrester had made her thus suffer; she felt instinctively that he had brought sorrow to this poor girl too; that she was, in fact, another victim of his treachery. As dearly as May had once loved this man, she now felt his worthlessness, and among her most bitter trials was the humiliation to her own strong pride. No one could blame May more than she blamed herself for her conduct.

Now that the glamour of Guy's presence and his supposed love for her were removed, she could see things in a very different light, and she was ashamed of what she now deemed her rash and unmaidenly conduct.

But May was a harsh judge of her own actions; for she had certainly never deserved the latter condemnation. Her trust in the gay artist had been born of childlike faith in him. She was too young, innocent, and confiding, to realize that evil could possibly be made out of it in any way.

But after the serpent had entered her paradise she was a child no more. She knew good from evil; nay, she told herself that she had done evil in carrying on the clandestine love affair she had done, and that she was being punished for her conduct. That the punishment was inadequate to her strength was shown in the sad, black-ringed eyes, with that ever-weary look in them, which stirred the heart to pity to witness.

She never spoke of her husband, not even to

good old Mrs. Wheeler; and although that kind creature would have dearly loved to have launched a wagon-load of invectives at the destroyer of her young lady's peace, still, in the face of her own dumb agony, she was silenced, loquacious as she in reality was.

Poor May! Mrs. Wheeler shook her head sadly as she watched the thin figure, graceful still, which was once so perfect in symmetrical form, while old Thomas rubbed his, with a decided shade of temper in the movement.

"Poor lamb!" he murmured. "She's just the ghost of herself, and that's what she is. I never did hold with them artist chaps, and so I made bold to tell you; but you see women can't get over sentiment, and you wouldn't believe me."

"You said he meant honourable to her, and where could he have found a more winsome wife! But there! they loves a change of faces, them artists do, and there's no denying it. It's only another instance of what I have heard before; that smart chap coming running after our Miss May, and then to walk off and leave her as soon as she had a father about to inquire his intentions!"

"Some folks always do know more than their neighbours, and think they are able to see through brick walls when they haven't the sense to judge what things are like through a dusty window!" retorted Mrs. Wheeler irritably.

"And them is generally the ones who says, 'I told you so,' if they think they have the chance. But I'll tell you what it is, Thomas. It is neither for you nor me to speak, or to think either, but just to try and make things as bright and comfortable as we can for our dear young lady. Why, even Sir Roger has found that out, and I see him looking at her sometimes with such a strange expression on his face. He is ever so much kinder to Miss May than he used to be, there's no doubt about that," and Mrs. Wheeler was right.

Sir Roger Dalkeith was softened by his daughter's sufferings—very much softened; but it was difficult to him to acknowledge it after all his years of proud reserve.

May could not say now that he never went to her room, for he often called in to see her, and sat beside her bed or easy chair; and little by little his eyes wandered to the beautiful picture of his wife, and rested on it, full of such sadness that at length his daughter found heart and voice, and spoke to him about her.

"Father," she said, slipping her hand into his, "you cannot think how I long for a few details of my mother's life. You forbade me years ago to speak of her, but, perhaps you will forgive my disobedience; you would if you know how all my life I have pined for her love and gentle ministrations. Had I had a mother to love I should never have got into this trouble which now overshadows my existence."

"Dear father, we should both be happier if you would but let the subject of my dear mother be an open book, that I might learn from its pages; and in talking of her we should be drawn together. Think if you cannot humour my wish; there is not much of interest in my life," she ended, sadly.

Sir Roger sat in silence for a considerable time, his fine features changed with the struggle going on within. It was a very hard thing which May had asked of him; but his heart was filled with pity for her evident suffering, and he felt that he must do all he could to please her. Moreover, since he had been more with May he had been drawn to her.

The queenly pride with which she bore her trouble pleased him. Never by word or deed did she show any wish to see the man again who had deceived her; and the old Baronet felt that she was a true Dalkeith, even though she had once let that "will o' the wisp"—love—lead her out of the way.

"Ask anything you like, child; I will answer you," he said, with an effort. "I cannot do more; in fact, May, it does not come easy to me to speak of anything about which I feel deeply."

"I know," she said, simply, "and I thank

you," and she stooped and kissed his thin, aristocratic hand.

All against his will his heart softened, and in silence he laid his cheek against hers. And so they remained for a length of time. Neither quite knew how, but both felt that a fresh chapter in their lives had begun.

"Was she as beautiful as that?" queried the girl, softly, her eyes upturned to the picture, which, somehow, always seemed to catch the sunshine through the several windows of May's room.

"Quite as beautiful," he responded, readily. "I never have seen a finer face than your mother's, my dear."

"Yet you did not love her!"

A spasm of pain crossed his face.

"Who told you that I did not love her, child?" he asked, with sudden emotion.

"You left her—you sent her from you," she stammered.

A gleam of the old pride and anger distorted his features, but Sir Roger was a man of strong will, and controlled himself.

"I see. A traitor has been in the camp," he returned, more than half sadly. "I need not inquire where you learnt such news. But let it pass; in part it is true, but not wholly."

"I did love your mother, May, loved her better than anyone else in the world, loved her with all the love of which my nature was capable. But that did not satisfy her, and, perhaps, it was a matter of small wonder."

"She was many years my junior, and should have chosen a younger mate, one who could have made a greater demonstration of his affection, as I could not—one who would have given in to her whims and followed her ways; then she would, I doubt not, have made a good wife. As it was, we could not get on—it is often the way with two strong wills—so we parted."

"But, child, I beg you to understand that I have nothing to say against your mother, save that she and I could not agree. But, at the same time, do not doubt that I loved her. Perhaps I never knew how much till I stood beside her newly-made grave."

"I almost wish I had taken her body to the resting-place of our own family. I had it in my heart to do so, but I had not the courage to re-open the old story which must be well-nigh forgotten. So she lies in a foreign graveyard—poor soul!"

May listened, her great blue eyes filled with tear-drops, her lips quivering with emotion. She held on very tightly by his hand.

"Oh, father! how sad, how dreadful, to think of her dying from home like that; how I hope she had kind, good friends. Thank Heaven she could not have known poverty, at any rate."

The guilty look upon her father's face stayed her words, and was reflected upon her own with one of fear.

"Oh! pray do not say she ever wanted for anything," pleaded the girl. "Father, do, do speak!"

But Sir Roger seemed far more inclined to keep silence. After a time he raised his eyes, with a spark of the old defiance in them.

"How could I tell she needed aught. I would have gladly helped her had she asked me."

A sad, well-nigh bitter smile passed over May's face.

"She was right not to ask you," she said, slowly. "I am proud of my mother."

Sir Roger Dalkeith regarded his daughter with wonder. Here was his wife's spirit reproduced in her child.

"Poor mother!" she continued. "Oh, how I should have loved her! Father, you will never know what the loss of her has been to me, how I have longed and pined for her love. If she were but alive I would go on my knees and entreat you to give her back to me."

"She would not have come back, May."

"Oh! yes, she would, had you told her that you wanted her—had you explained to her that you had loved her all along. If you could let her know how the want of her has blighted

my life she would have come," cried the girl, passionately, her face aglow with her feelings.

Her father regarded her with sadness.

"Don't, don't, May. Your words go to my heart," he murmured. "Heaven knows that if I could give you back your mother I would."

"If she were alive you would ask her to come?" asked May, wistfully.

"Yes, child, yes! I would for your sake," he returned, with emotion. And May twined her arms about his neck and laid her head upon his breast, and rested there for the first time in her life.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE COMPLICATED WEB WE CALL "LIFE."

NOTWITHSTANDING the fact that Sir Roger Dalkeith and his daughter had never been upon such good terms before, her health did not at all improve; but, on the contrary, it ever grew worse and worse, until the time came when May could not leave her room.

She thought the days were not far off for her when she should leave all her sorrows behind, and join the mother for whose love and companionship she longed, beyond the earthly shadows. And Sir Roger could not drive the same thought out of his heart.

May was his only child, and even though his nature was a hard one he shrank back from losing her, feeling that life for him would be a sad and lonely thing indeed without her, the sole companion of so many years of his life.

The medico from St. Ormo was in daily attendance; but he could not minister to a "mind diseased." He could only speak of "nervous prostration," and suggest further advice—for, of course, he knew nothing of the secret sorrow which was for ever gnawing at the poor girl's mind.

Nor is it the first time that a broken heart has borne that name.

The advice was willingly carried out.

Sir Roger telegraphed for the most eminent consulting physician of the day, who travelled down to Lake St. Ormo to meet the minor light of his profession at May's bedside.

His knowledge of the world was a far more extended one than that of the local practitioner.

He saw at once that something was eating out the very heart of this white rosebud; but not one word of enlightenment could he glean from Sir Roger upon the subject.

Of course he put it down to the right cause. He did not doubt but that May was in love, and that the course of her affection did not run smoothly.

He never dreamed that any man could be so base as to behave as Guy Forrester had done to May.

He thought that there had been a lover's quarrel, or that her known-to-be stern parent had crossed her inclinations, and that she had taken it to heart.

This, however, he did not confide to the Farnshire practitioner. He merely altered the method of treatment, and strongly advised change of air and scene. The rest he reserved for a *little à l'été* with the Baronet, who had invited him to dine with him before returning to town.

As the two men sat together in the pretty dining-room of St. Ormo Cottage, with the sweet perfume of the spring flowers coming in at the open window, the great man of the medical world looked over his ruby wine at Sir Roger Dalkeith with penetrating eyes, for a thought had suddenly come to him.

"This is a charming little place, Sir Roger. I wonder Lord Rangor cares to let it. But I daresay he often runs down to look after his own interests? He used to be a little too fond of the turf; but he has, I suppose, sown all his wild oats, for a change seems to have come over the spirit of his dream, and he has given up everything of the sort and gone abroad. I heard of him

last in Australia. There is a good deal in the man, I believe."

"I have not seen him for years, except when once I met him accidentally," answered Sir Roger, almost indifferently. "An occasional letter is about the extent of our intercourse. I don't think he has ever been in Farnshire since the property has been in his possession."

The doctor pursed up his lips thoughtfully. Here was a *cul de sac*.

It was evident that he must look further to discover a lover for the fragile and lovely girl who had very much aroused his sympathies, and whom he felt he would greatly like to help out of the difficulties which he felt certain were causing her sorrow, and consequent illness.

In truth, no one could look in the sad and pathetic young face without a conviction that the girl was very miserable from some cause or other.

"Beautiful as this home of yours is, perhaps it has been too dull and lonely for your daughter. But I suppose you have taken care to provide her with young companions?" suggested the London doctor. "Young people cannot thrive without plenty of fun and sunshine; in fact, one may say a certain amount of excitement," and he looked searchingly into the Baronet's face.

Sir Roger flashed.

He scarcely liked the catechism. But doctors are privileged beings, and he was obliged to answer him.

"No, we have kept no company. May and I receive no visitors. We are, I hope, content with each other's society."

Down went the physician's glass upon the table with an impatient clatter.

"No wonder the poor child is ill! She is pining, pining away—moped to death! Excuse me, Dalkeith, but an old bookworm like yourself is no companion for a young girl like Miss Dalkeith."

"I tell you honestly I thought she was breaking her heart after some prohibited sweetheart; and I was going to say to you, 'If you value your daughter's life give in to her wishes, even at the expense of your own.' But if it is the lack of the opportunity of getting a lover even, for Heaven's sake give up this unnatural life, and come back to the world for your daughter's sake. I tell you plainly that, although, so far, there is no real disease, consumption may develop itself at any time."

"The constitutions of young ladies are ticklish things to deal with. They are a tissue of nerves—and nearly all their ailments are centred in their affections, or the want of them."

"Lose no time, take Miss Dalkeith to the sea without the delay of a day, and let her see the world and society. I prognosticate that she will gradually mend when she feels an interest in life. As it is, she has none."

"You are complimentary," returned Sir Roger, with a sad smile. "I believe my daughter has been content with my companionship; but, of course, your orders shall be attended to as far as I find it possible."

"Complimentary! We never attempt anything of the sort to anyone short of a valetudinarian countess or duchess, my dear fellow. Take the little girl away to-morrow, and, as soon as she can bear it, get some nice lads and lasses about her—and be sure you let me know how she is getting on. I am interested in her. You may be proud of your daughter, Sir Roger. She is very like what her mother was when you first brought her into London society. I remember she came to consult me medically upon one occasion; but, dear me, it must be eighteen or twenty years ago. I thought her a remarkably pretty woman!"

The Baronet never answered him a word. What he knew or what he did not know of the history of that parting he was unaware—and he preferred to be silent.

(To be continued.)



## THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

—O—

## CHAPTER XVI.

PAUL DESBOROUGH sat at the Towers! The man whom Cyril Farquhar had denounced as one of the worst and wickedest of his race!

Brenda felt stunned and bewildered as she sat in her unaccustomed place at the side of the table, opposite to the stranger, whose mocking eyes seemed to meet hers when she most wished to avoid them.

Sir Eric apologised for having invited him to join such a small family party; but Mr. Desborough, with a glance across the table at his opposite neighbour, averred that so long as the family party consisted of its present members, he could wish the quartette to be prolonged *ad infinitum*.

Lady Manville smiled, and said something polite, but Brenda had determined that she would not speak to him unless she were obliged. Of course it was not long before he noticed that she preferred to address her remarks either to her chaperon or her guardian, but he pretended not to mind it, and the conversation flowed on in an even channel.

Brenda was sorry to see that Sir Eric took more wine than usual, till his pale cheeks flushed, and his eyes brightened. Still she saw how changed he was by his illness, and supposed that more stimulants were necessary to keep up his strength.

He seemed to have forgotten his anger, and his eyes sought hers constantly, in a way that did not tend to increase her composure.

It was a relief when dinner was over, and they moved into the garden. Brenda stuck to Lady Manville's side, and engaged her in conversation, whilst the two men leaned over the balustrade of the terrace smoking their cigarettes, and lazily admiring the view.

Womanlike, she was disappointed that Mr. Desborough did not make an effort to talk to her when she had carefully entrenched herself under her chaperon's wing; and she was still more surprised when, having complied with Lady Manville's request that she would sing to her, she was left unmolested at the piano.

With a natural desire to show off her voice she chose the songs that would suit it best, and knew that she was doing herself complete justice; but song followed song, and nobody did more than utter a mechanical "thank you!"

At last she looked over her shoulder and saw that the widow had fallen into a gentle doze, Mr. Desborough had taken up *The World*, and Sir Eric was leaning back in his chair, his handsome face looking terribly aged and worn. He got up as she was watching him, and came towards her.

"Come and talk to me," he said, quietly, as he folded up her music, and closed the piano.

"I certainly won't sing to any of you again, for nobody appreciated it. I think I shall take to a novel. I'm just in the last volume."

"I listened to every note, and so did Desborough. He said yours was a charming voice, far truer than Lillian's, than Mrs. Wyndham's."

"Don't compare me with that woman," with an impatient shrug of her shoulders as she subsided on to a round ottoman furnished with separated seats.

"Why not?" sternly, and then his face softened. "Don't join in the cry against her, poor little woman. Is she never to find any pity except from us?"

"Would she care for a woman's friendship? I don't fancy so. Those sort of women want something stronger."

"You know nothing about them. Come, child, you can afford to be generous. You are positively maddening to night!" leaning over her with unmistakable admiration in his eyes.

"Stop! Stop! I should think, from the effect on your friend," casting a scornful glance in Mr. Desborough's direction.

"Can't you guess why he is keeping out of danger?" with a significant smile. "Don't

you know that you are more precious to me than anything else in the house? I don't put you under lock and key, though I know some of my friends are not to be trusted, but I ward them off by telling them that you are my property."

"Your property?" looking up at him with flashing eyes. "That I never was, and never shall be. But why do you talk such nonsense? I know very well that you hate me."

"Hate you, do I? Are you quite sure?" with an odd look in his eyes, whilst his fingers pulled a withered leaf from amongst the roses on her breast.

"Yes, of course, I am. You hate me and Cyril, and all the nice people," with a saucy smile, "and you are devoted to Mr. Desborough, Mrs. Wyndham, and all the wild and wicked ones."

"Wickedness palls sometimes, and nothing bores so much as constant dissipation."

"And yet you go in for it, don't you?" touched, in spite of herself, by the intense weariness of his tone.

"Yes, what is there left for me? Bren, I'll tell you something," lowering his voice. "In the next few days, it will be all up with me, or else I shall be a happy man for the rest of my life."

Brenda recoiled from him with an expression of the deepest disgust. She thought of all the disparaging remarks that had been made on the fast widow who haunted the gaming-tables at Monte Carlo, and could not conceive how any man, except the most contemptible creature in existence, could care to be her slave.

Sir Eric did not seem to notice her action, or her expressive silence. He sat dreamily by her side, his thoughts far away from The Towers, his mind conjuring up the strangest visions of the future.

Ah! how his golden-haired Lillian would laugh at the old-fashioned, prejudice-ridden county-folk of the neighbourhood. How prettily she would mock them at their solemn funeral dinner-parties! How she would make them open their eyes at the revels she would introduce into the home of the Farquhars!

It would be well to get Desborough launched into a pronounced flirtation with his ward before Mrs. Wyndham arrived; but, in order to effect this, he must pretend to be devoted to Brenda himself, for Paul Desborough was always keenest after forbidden game. That was why he was trying to engross her to-night, though his heart and brain were full of that other woman who might be the curse, but by no stretch of the imagination could develop into the blessing of his life.

He bent over her in the most lover-like attitude, stole a rose from her dress and put it in the button-hole of his dresscoat, robbed her of her necklace and bracelets and slipped them quietly into his pocket, saying that it was bad taste to put alabaster and jet together. And when she rose from her seat, looking flushed and indignant, he gave a low laugh, and said,—

"I delight in a quarrel with you because there is nothing so delicious as making it up!"

"You are a lucky fellow!" remarked Mr. Desborough, whose temper that evening had been remarkably ruffled. "But what on earth is the good of a chaperon if she allows you to flirt with her charge for the space of an hour-and-a-half?" pulling out his watch, as the ladies having retired, they were making their way to their own rooms in order to fetch their smoking-jackets, preparatory to a game of billiards.

"Come, draw it mild! Half-an-hour would be nearer the mark," and Sir Eric smiled. "Don't you know that chaperons are meant to keep off detrimentals? Now, nobody in his senses could class me amongst them."

"Or me, thank Heaven!" with a yawn. "Do you always go on in that way with your cousin? Because, frankly speaking, it isn't lively for lookers on," he asked in the billiard-room.

Sir Eric was delighted. His schemes were

answering perfectly. Desborough was already rabidly jealous. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I was on guard. She won't do for you, Paul. You can try your hand to-morrow on anyone else. I've invited several pretty ones on purpose."

"Thanks. I've a decided prejudice in favour of beauty, and a determined resolution to flirt with no one but Miss F.," he added to himself, as he chose his cue.

"You never met my cousin before?" Sir Eric asked, with apparent carelessness, as he made a good stroke and landed the red in a pocket.

There was a pause—an intentional pause—before Paul Desborough answered. Nothing would have induced him to betray what he had seen; but he saw that his host's suspicions had been roused by the girl's evident embarrassment at their introduction, and he rather liked the idea of creating a little mystery.

"I met her to-day for the first time," he said, briefly, "and I'm not likely to forget it."

Sir Eric, watching him intently, saw a slight smile move the ends of his moustaches, and his suspicions were more on the alert than ever. He felt himself insulted as a guardian by this secret between his innocent ward and an unprincipled man of the world; and yet, in his insane jealousy of Cyril, he would not have been sorry to see her fall in love with him; and in his fervent wish to keep Mrs. Wyndham's smiles to himself, he would have been thankful to see Desborough fully occupied with his ward.

Entirely engrossed with his own selfish designs, he had meant purposely to throw them together, not attempting to count the consequences, or remembering that a girl's honest heart might be broken before the game was finished. Jealousy rode triumphantly over honour and every manly scruple—for Eric Farquhar, ever since that fatal yielding to temptation on the night of Sir Peter's death, had degenerated from an honourable English gentleman, anxious to act fairly to all the world as well as to his own conscience, to a dishonourable, unscrupulous scoundrel, who did not care through what depths of infamy he waded so long as his own particular world saw no mud upon his boots, and he managed to reach his object.

Lady Manville, who had run through her income in frantic efforts to marry off her daughters, was thankful to find a comfortable home, where she could live in luxury, and with all the dignity befitting her rank, without spending a shilling of her own.

Her friends praised her for so unselfishly placing herself at the disposal of her nephew; but she disclaimed all commendation, saying that as a lonely widow nothing could give her greater pleasure than to acquire another daughter of her own to afford her a fresh interest in life; and as to Sir Eric, he was the most charming man that was ever seen, and she could never forget that he was her own dear Marian's son.

She allowed herself consequently to sink into the undignified position of a mere tool. Before she arrived Sir Eric made her aware that Lady Sophia would have no objection, if he chose, to slide from the graver position of a guardian to that of a husband. This was to guard against her interfering between himself and his ward whenever he felt inclined to amuse himself with her. He also dropped a hint that he considered that the girl's mind wanted opening, for she might just as well have been brought up in a convent as in the seclusion of The Towers.

Lady Manville smiled, and said she thought a cousin of Sir Eric's was in no danger of developing into a prude, especially when he treated her as he did.

The next morning the widow gave orders that her breakfast should always be sent up to her own room; and she despatched her maid, Miss Ward, to advise Miss Farquhar never to go down to breakfast so long as there were only gentlemen in the house. Brenda

readily acquiesced, and was delighted to think how annoyed Sir Eric would be at having to pour out the coffee, when the door of her little sitting-room was thrown open, and in he walked, followed by Mr. Desborough, and a servant bearing a tray.

Sir Eric laughed as he bent down to kiss her.

"You were quite right, darling!—It is much cosier up here, and Desborough and I will join you as often as you like!"

"You might have waited till you were invited," she said, indignantly, as the hot blood rushed to her face.

"Not at all, the coffee would have been cold. Sit down, Desborough, and make yourself at home! My cousin is too shy to say how delighted she is to see you."

Mr. Desborough bowed gravely, as he took his place by the small table, on which there was not space enough for half the delicacies which had been brought up in rapid succession.

Brenda was very silent till Sir Eric touched her foot with his, and muttered under his monosyllables,—

"Don't be so confoundedly sulky, or I'll pay you out!"

This was no empty threat, as she knew by past experience, for was he not already paying her out for keeping aloof at her chaperon's suggestion?

Mr. Desborough threw her an appealing glance, and in common courtesy to a guest she had to unbend.

Directly breakfast was over, however, he rose from his seat.

"I will intrude no longer, Miss Farquhar. Your guardian," with a scornful emphasis on the word, "is responsible for having brought me here!"

"Stop a bit, Paul!" said Sir Eric, hastily. "I've got a heap of business to attend to, so I must leave you to my cousin's tender mercies!"

"Miss Farquhar's tender mercies?" raising his eyebrows. "I didn't know that she had any," and with another grave bow he left the room.

"That man is a gentleman!" said Brenda, pointedly. "He knows when he isn't wanted." "Look here!" said Sir Eric, savagely, "I'll stand no nonsense from you. If you don't choose to be civil to my guests of your own accord, I'll find a way to make you!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

DURING all the rest of the day Sir Eric was in a fever of expectation, for which his ward felt inclined to despise him. He had no rest until a telegram was brought him at luncheon to tell him that his divinity would not be down till the 7.15 train. His hand shook visibly as he opened it, but he said nothing about it till later in the afternoon.

Lady Manville exclaimed at the lateness of the hour. It would upset all their arrangements, and make dinner so absurdly late.

"We can dine at half-past eight, no harm in that," he answered, with a slight frown. "You won't mind going to meet these other people at half-past four?"

"Not at all, I may as well drive in that direction as in any other," with her gracious smile, reminding herself that it was not her cue to object to anything, though she had an instinctive dislike to this Mrs. Wyndham, who, no doubt, came down late so as to make a fuss; and to have her host all to herself.

Brenda was just thinking to herself, with some bitterness, how completely she was set aside, and made of no account in the house where she was once sole mistress, when her guardian came up to her, and said, in a low voice,—

"I shall want you to come to the station with me at seven o'clock!"

"Not to meet Mrs. Wyndham?" she cried aghast.

"May I ask what is your objection?" looking stern and dignified.

"Oh, I don't know. I shan't be wanted, you'll wish me at Hanover!"

"Don't be absurd. Shan't we have plenty of time to talk afterwards?" his eyes brightening with the delicious expectation.

"Can't the universal chaperon be brought out again?"

"No, it is too late; and, besides, I am going, and I should prefer you!"

"You are too good!" dropping a curtsy.

"Might I remark that I should prefer somebody else?"

"No!" shortly. "Come along, Desborough, and let us have a game of billiards!"

As the two men walked off she turned to Lady Manville,—

"Fancy shutting yourself up in a hot billiard-room on a lovely day like this!"

"My dear, when excitement has become your constant diet, you can't live without it. It is as necessary to you as opium to the opium-eater; and now, if you will excuse me," taking out her elegant little handkerchief, "I think I will take a nap. Perhaps it would be as well if you practised a few songs. Last night, it struck me, there was something—" her head drooped, and the sentence was unfinished.

"Old humbug—she never heard a note!" was Brenda's inward comment; but she thought there was some good in the advice; so she went to a small room, called "the den," because the boys used to laugh at the effeminate word "boudoir," and sat down to the piano.

She turned over her songs with a loving hand, for each and all reminded her of Cyril—Cyril, with his laughing blue eyes, his brave spirit, his tender heart. He was away, and she was without a friend now—in a position which demanded the utmost tact and discretion, and she was only a helpless, impulsive girl, who had the habit of doing and saying the wrong thing whenever she could.

What chance had she against experienced men of the world, who would do their best to take her in, and laugh at her afterwards—laugh at her for an unsophisticated girl, who believed all their pretty speeches, or else for a young barbarian, who looked upon men as dangerous animals.

She put her hands on the keys, and threw her whole voice into the words of a song that she liked, because it seemed so especially to appeal to her, and to express her needs:—

"Oh, give me a friend, tender and true!"

Her beautiful soprano voice rang out through the silent room, and found an echo in a long-drawn sigh.

She turned with a startled air, to find Paul Desborough close behind her.

"Why are you not playing billiards?" she asked, almost fiercely, because she was startled at finding herself no longer alone.

"Am I to play billiards all day long?"

"I thought you cared for nothing else."

"Thank you, Miss Farquhar!" intensely nettled by the contempt in her voice. "You know nothing of me, so you give your opinion freely; whilst I know something of you, and keep it to myself."

"You are too good! Are you sure that you have not imparted it to my guardian?"

"What do you take me for? Would you have liked me to tell him when, and where, and how I first saw you?"

The colour rushed up into her face; her bosom heaved wildly; but, by a desperate effort, she managed to answer him calmly.—

"I was only having tea with my cousin."

"Tee?" raising his well-defined eyebrows and smiling slightly. "The next time you have tea at 'The Miller's Rest' I hope I shall be there—but not as a looker-on!"

"I shall never have tea at 'The Miller's Rest' with you," haughtily.

"We will leave out the tea," with a mocking smile shining in his eyes. "So long as you treat me as well as you did Farquhar I shall not complain."

"Not in the least degree likely!" with the utmost scorn; "he is my cousin."

"Cousins seem to have the most extraordinary privileges down here. Sir Eric, for instance, nearly took my breath away this morning."

"Do you think I liked it?" standing before him with all her remembered anger flashing from her tawny eyes. "Just because he is my guardian he considers that he can treat me as he likes."

"Why do you allow it?" he asked, as her beauty grew upon him more and more with every changing expression of her most expressive face.

"Because I am alone," as a cloud came over it, "with no one to back me up."

"You need not be alone a moment longer than you choose," as he came a step nearer. "Let me be your friend, and I would back you up through thick and thin."

She looked at him doubtfully. His soft voice, his eloquent eyes, had their effect on her impressionable young heart; but all the seductive beauty of his faultless face only reminded her forcibly of Cyril's words of warning.

She drew back, and said gravely,—

"I have heard that Mr. Desborough's friendship is a dangerous possession."

"Somebody has slandered me," he burst out, fiercely. "I could have sworn it from the way in which you've treated me. I can guess who it is—Cyril Farquhar. He might have added that I was infinitely safer as a friend than as a foe!"

"Is it what you call 'good form' to threaten a girl?" very quietly.

"Nothing was further from my thoughts. Why do you so persistently misjudge me? I will be your friend, whether you wish it or no. Whenever you want to rebel against your guardian," with the most scornful emphasis on the word, "I will back you up. Remember that the more you give in to him the worse it will be for you, and it's so absurd, when, if you choose to assert yourself, you can do anything you like with him."

"Can I?" with a mocking laugh. "I wish you would tell me how."

"Am I to teach a girl the power of her own beauty? You treat him too much like a brother. Pursue a perfectly different plan. Freeze to him one moment, give into him the next, so you will always keep him in doubt as to the state of your feelings."

"But my feelings wouldn't matter at all. If I hated him like poison he wouldn't care a straw."

"Do you really mean it?" as he thought of Sir Eric's long, lover-like talk of the night before, and the elaborate care which he had taken to warn off his friend. "I'm getting awfully mixed. Will it be fearfully cool of me to ask which of the cousins you are going to marry?"

A rose-flush passed over the fair young face, and left it the next moment unusually pale.

"Neither!" an involuntary sadness in her voice.

"Then what made Sir Eric say you were forbidden fruit?"

"Perhaps he did not consider you the sort of man a guardian ought to approve of."

"Oh, hang the guardian!" he exclaimed, wrathfully. "It is the most confounded humbug I ever heard of, Miss Farquhar!" appealingly. "I never set up for a saint, but, upon my honour, I'm not more of a sinner than he is!"

"Perhaps not. I don't wish to hear anything more about it," turning away.

"Stay one moment. Won't you have me for a friend?"

"That is an honour I must decline!" with a mocking bow.

"You defy me?" his dark eyes gleaming like two living coals. "Then let me tell you you've made a great mistake. I could have let you go last night without a thought, but not to-day. You pretend to despise me!—you



pretend to hate me! Enjoy your hatred, make the most of it; it won't last long!"

"You are wrong. To judge by what I'm feeling now it will increase steadily."

"You don't really hate me now—no woman ever did. Look at me once. I haven't had the small-pox!" smiling, as he bent over her, perfectly conscious of the charm which lay in lip and eye and voice.

No woman had ever resisted him yet. He watched the colour stealing over the soft cheeks, the severity of the mouth relax into an involuntary smile, the proud eyes droop in unwilling submission, and knew that he had not boasted in vain.

The next moment she threw up her hands as if to ward off a danger, exclaiming,—

"I hate you! I hate you! I wish to heavens you had never come!" and she was outside in the glowing sunshine, with heaving breast and hurrying pulses, whilst he was left alone in the beautifully furnished den, laughing softly to himself.

"Joy! she's a magnificent creature!" he said to himself; "far too good for either of the Farquhars. Eric's a knave, and Cyril's a fool. I could win her without a doubt, only Lillian Wyndham, nurse her, is coming to spoil it all!" A gloomy expression crossed his handsome face, and all the brightness went out of it. "If I could only stop her mouth! If I could only make her fall over head and ears with Eric Farquhar—then she would be willing to let me go. I must manage it somehow. This girl will give me no rest till I've conquered her. She was so splendid in her impotent defiance!"

Brenda, hurrying along the terrace in her haste to escape from Paul Desborough, came upon Lady Manville, who had just roused herself from her nap, and was standing by the morning-room window.

"I have not heard the piano for some time," she said, reproachfully, with a suspicious glance at the girl's flushed face.

"No; because Mr. Desborough came and interrupted me!"

"Then why did you not tell him that you were busy? Nothing is so bad for any man as placing yourself always at his beck and call. He loses all respect for you."

"I did nothing of the kind!" angrily. "We were quarrelling all the time."

"I cannot conceive that it was much of a quarrel, as the *titte-à-tête* lasted so long," with severe dignity; "and I only feel bound to warn you that Mr. Desborough is better fitted to be my nephew's friend than yours!"

"Then why does he persistently throw us together?"

Lady Manville looked puzzled, and then she said, slowly,—

"Sometimes I think he has a mania for reducing everyone to his own level. But I must go and put on my bonnet. By-the-by, Eric told me to tell you that he wanted you," she added, on her way to the door.

"Then he may find me!" and Brenda returned to the garden, having adopted the part of Mr. Desborough's advice that seemed to suit her best.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

A troop of people came down by the half-past four train, and were brought from the station in landau, brougham, and break.

The two Miss McIntoshes, of Kintoch, were very lively young ladies, fresh from the military attractions of Malta. Sir Eric called the fair one Joe, and the brunette Jac, with a familiarity that seemed rather shocking to everybody but themselves.

They were dressed in dark-green, tailor-made gowns, which looked as if they had been originally designed for men, with maseline collars and ties, and pot-bats at the top of their brushed-up hair.

Brenda did not know how to talk to them, and hesitated as she stood in the hall, looking unusually shy and very dignified in a lovely

grey dress, fresh from Bond-street; but the two sisters seized hold of her, and embraced her enthusiastically, declaring that they knew already she and they would be fearful chums.

"Don't demolish Miss Farquhar before I have a chance of a word with her!" said Colonel Westbrook, a military-looking man, with a slight, muscular figure, a keen, intellectual face, and a heavy, grey moustache.

Brenda turned to him eagerly, and held out her hand with a cordial greeting.

"I am so very glad to see you!" she said, fervently.

"I'm too delighted to hear you say so!" his face kindling with pleasure. "But what have you been doing to my old friend Eric? He looks the ghost of his former self!"

"Nonsense! I'm all right. Come along, Westbrook, and have a brandy-and-soda. That will be more in your line than tea and muffins."

"No, no. I prefer the tea and Miss Farquhar."

"You will see quite enough of Brenda. She'll be the torment of your life! Desborough," lowering his voice, "look after those girls, there's a good fellow; they are too much for me!"

"What on earth did he ask them for?" murmured Desborough to himself, as he went with the others into the morning-room.

He was delighted to find, as he took stock of the various men who were busy handing cups of tea to everyone who didn't want them, that neither the fat Captain Porter, nor the lank Major Winter, nor the huge Charlie Waterman, nor the small Lord Pinkerton, were at all likely to outrival him in his own particular line.

Brenda treated them with the same polite unconcern as Lady Manville, who smiled on everybody, and chatted benignly with young Lady Pinkerton, who was the bride of a viscount, and the daughter of a retired grocer, and had all her toilets from the best shops with the worst results.

Brenda was bewildered by the fire of chaff all round her, which had been started by Mr. Desborough, who set the conversation going in the most masterly manner, and then quietly dropped out of it, and into a chair by the side of the tea-table.

"Don't you think it had better be a truce between us?" leaning his elbow on the table, and almost turning his back on everyone but his hostess, "You will feel awfully out of it, you know; and I shall be the only one to understand you."

"I don't see why you should understand me better than anyone else!" fixing her eyes on the lump of sugar she was absently transferring from the silver sugar basin to her own tea-cup.

"Excuse me," stopping her hand on its way, "you never take sugar. Who were you thinking of then?" with a mischievous glance straight into her disgusted face.

"Of all these people, of course."

"Or of somebody else—who is neither in this room nor the next? Ah! that shot went home," with a smile at her overpowering blushes.

"Let us make a compact," leaning forward with a sudden eagerness. "You will feel alone in this crowd—don't deny it—you will feel worse still when Mrs. Wyndham arrives to-night. I'm only going to stay here for a few days; why not make use of me so long as I'm at hand? You needn't call me a friend. I'll be your errand-boy, your body-guard, anything you like; and I'll promise to remember that you are always thinking of somebody else, longing for somebody else, and positively hating me because I am not somebody else, and never can be. These are just the sort of men to be troublesome, and I shall know how to manage them."

She looked up doubtfully. There was a hubbub of laughter and chatter; everybody seemed to know everybody else. There were allusions to Bobby "This" and Jimmy "That," and peals of laughter about somebody's escapades at Goodwood.

Her heart failed her. He did not even ask to be called a friend—there could be no danger in letting him be her "errand-boy." What a strangely musical voice he had, as he said softly,—

"If you agree to the compact, let the rose drop from the front of your dress."

Slowly her hand went towards the rose. It seemed as if a power which she could not resist came over her—as if a spell were cast about her. She hesitated, and met his eyes bent full upon hers. His lips moved; there was such a noise that she positively could not hear the words he was saying, and yet they seemed to influence her. She felt the colour leave her cheeks; a sudden chill pass through her veins, and yet her fingers detached the flower, which was caught long before it reached the ground—caught with such a flash of triumph from Paul's dark eyes that a mis-giving seized her at once.

"Give it me back. I didn't mean it," she said, impulsively, holding out her hand.

"Not I," and the rose was secreted inside his coat before any other eyes could rest upon it. "This is the first instalment of my future wages."

"What are you doing, Brenda, my love?" inquired Lady Manville, as there came a sudden fall in the stream of talk, and it occurred to her that a move was desirable.

"Miss Farquhar has been very busy inquiring into the character of a new errand-boy," began Mr. Desborough; but Brenda broke in hastily,—

"Do any of you feel inclined for a game of tennis?"

Then they all streamed out on to the terrace, admired the view and chose sides and rackets. The two officers seemed naturally to become the property of the Miss McIntoshes. Lady Pinkerton excused herself on the plea that her dress was not suited for such violent exercises. Charlie Waterman challenged the Viscount, and Brenda sat down between his wife and Lady Manville.

Sir Eric came out of the house with Colonel Westbrook, and the three men threw themselves down on the grass at the ladies' feet.

The Colonel felt much interested in Sir Eric's ward, and directed his attention principally to her. To him it seemed an almost incomprehensible situation, and he wondered if Lady Sophia could possibly be in her senses. It was such an incredible thing that a mother should place her daughter under the care of a man of Sir Eric's age and antecedents. And there was Eric, instead of thinking himself the luckiest fellow in the world, looking aged and worn and so absent-minded that his thoughts kept straying from the topic in hand; and the girl seemed anxious and unsettled, in spite of her pleasant words and charming smiles.

He was sure that there was a screw loose somewhere, and he thought that the notorious widow, due at eight o'clock, might have something to do with it. Farquhar must be mad to have asked her, for she was scarcely the companion that Lady Sophia would have chosen for her daughter.

And then he looked up at "the daughter," and wondered why all the young men did not fall down and worship her.

He was amazed when Sir Eric looked at his watch for the hundredth time, and told Brenda it was time to start for the station.

She rose from her seat very reluctantly, and walked slowly towards the house. Desborough, who had been watching her intently, hurried after her.

"Do you object to going alone with Eric?"

"Yes; but it can't be helped."

"Farquhar, I'm coming with you, if you don't mind!" he called out at once; and Eric gave a grudging assent.

Brenda did not know whether to be glad or sorry. But if Paul expected to be thanked she disappointed him.

He had tact enough to leave her to her own thoughts during the drive, though he paid her every small attention that lay in his power.



[**"BRAVO, SIR ERIC! JUST AS IMPETUOUS AS EVER!"** CRIED A LAUGHING VOICE.]

Sir Eric's wild heart was in a tumult of happiness. Lillian Wyndham would soon be lodged under his roof—seated by his side at his own dinner-table—with him the whole delicious evening—and when parted from at night to be met again in the freshness of the August morning!

All her Monte Carlo admirers being left behind, he would have her to himself. Desborough was the only man he was afraid of; but then he was already captivated by Brenda, and there was no reason on earth why he should be preferred to his host.

The train was late, and he paced up and down the platform in a fever of anxiety, thankful that his friend had remained by the carriage.

Would she be kind to him, as she was that last evening under the orange trees, when her smile was so maddening, her manner so bewitching? or would absence have chilled her, and made her forget?

Would she drop his title, and call him Eric, as she did every now and then, as if on purpose to tantalise him? or would she be cold and proper, because prudish England was so different to the Riviera?

The train came hissing like a serpent into the station, and his eager eyes scanned it in feverish anxiety as it passed.

Suddenly his face brightened, his hand was on the door of a first-class carriage before it stopped. In his haste he threw it open while the train was still in motion.

"Bravo, Sir Eric! just as impetuous as ever!" cried a laughing voice, as a tiny hand was stretched out to him. "*Mon Dieu!* I am nearly roasted alive! I wonder what you will do to make up for the penance of this journey?"

He took the hand, in its delicate perfectly-fitting suede glove, and bent his handsome head over it, as if it had been the prize of the world.

He could scarcely speak for the tumult of emotion in his heart, whilst she looked up

into his face with laughing eyes, and shook out her frills and furbelows carelessly, as if she had left sentiment miles away, by the shores of the Mediterranean.

Side by side they walked through the station, whilst her maid and a footman in the Farquhar livery stayed to look after a pile of luggage which made the porters open their eyes.

Brenda, watching anxiously, thought Mrs. Wyndham was the tiniest, prettiest little thing she had ever seen as she advanced with a charming smile, in her Parisian toilette, her head scarcely reaching to Sir Eric's shoulder.

Her fears seemed too ridiculous about this doll-like creature, and she turned to welcome her with a cordial smile.

Suddenly the fair face changed, for an instant the pretty mouth quivered, the blue eyes looked scared. Could it be because Paul Desborough quietly stepped forward, and said in a casual manner,—

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Wyndham? I hope you are not very tired with your journey?"

"I am—I am," she said, hurriedly, as she stumbled over her dress on the step of the carriage.

"This is my cousin and ward—Brenda Farquhar," said Sir Eric, with a nervous tremor in his voice, although he had not noticed her agitation.

"Your ward? How absurd!" as she put up her face to kiss Brenda on both cheeks. "My dear, you look as if you could take care of yourself and him too. Doesn't he flirt with you from morning till night?"

"Miss Farquhar looks upon her guardian in the light of a brother," interposed Desborough, quickly, as Brenda coloured with vexation.

"I don't see what reason you have to say so," said Sir Eric, hastily, annoyed, although he did not know why.

"It would be very desirable that she should do so," remarked Mrs. Wyndham, demurely, with one quick flash up into his face from

under her long lashes which made his foolish heart beat fast.

"Welcome to The Towers!" he said, most fervently, as they stood together in the large hall, and he felt as if his dearest dreams were realised. "Tell me that you are glad to be here."

"Glad? Of course I am. But I tell you what, *mon ami*, I shall be still more glad of my dinner!"

She watched the disappointment in his face, and gave a low laugh of satisfaction.

"You are just the same as ever," he said, with an inflection of pain in his voice.

"Surely you are the last person in the world to wish me to be different!" with innocent eyes raised to his,

"Excuse me, but as it is so late don't you think it would be as well for me to show you to your rooms?" Brenda inquired, with dignified politeness.

Mrs. Wyndham shrugged her shoulders.

"Mightn't Sir Eric take me? I am so accustomed to having him as a sort of courier, and this house feels so strange."

Brenda drew back with a look of haughty surprise, which she was too inexperienced to hide.

"This way," said Sir Eric, with rather a flushed face, beginning to mount the broad staircase.

Paul Desborough bit his lip.

"Foreign fashions, Miss Farquhar."

"Don't talk to me of foreign fashions!" she said, with an irrepressible stamp of her foot. "Why should a woman cease to be a lady because she has been abroad?"

"Why do such women exist?" he said, gloomily.

"Mr. Desborough, we shall be late for dinner," and she ran upstairs, passing Sir Eric, who was going to his room, without taking the slightest notice of him.

(To be continued.)





[PREPARING FOR THE BALL—"THE BEST-LOOKING GIRL IN THE ROOM!"]

NOVELETTE.]

GEORGE CALTHORPE'S  
MISTAKE.

—20—

## CHAPTER I.

"Good news, mother dear!" exclaimed Ruth Hilton, joyously, coming into the small sitting-room where her mother was at work, and seeming to bring a ray of the winter sunshine in with her. "What do you think?"

"Well, my darling?" her mother returned, with a sad smile. "How can I think until you have told me?"

"Mrs. Varoy will take me as governess for her two little girls."

"Mrs. Varoy?"

"Yes."

"But, Ruth—"

"Well, mother?"

"I do not think she is an agreeable woman, though she is a rich one."

"Perhaps not. But then, mother, there is the adage, 'Paupers cannot be choosers.'"

"True, dear," with a heavy sigh; "and we are very little removed from paupers."

"I think it a lucky chance."

"How did she hear of you?"

"Well, you know, mother, that Mrs. Camelot thinks a good deal of my playing, and Mrs. Varoy heard me perform this afternoon at her 'at home,' and she asked Mrs. Camelot who I was, and whether I would go out to teach; and finally she offered me fifty pounds a-year. For that I am to give her eldest daughter music lessons as well."

"It is not much for you, my darling."

"But then think, mother. I have never been out before, and have no references, except Mrs. Camelot, who is kindness itself. But she has no children who require tuition; and really I think it would be a pity to throw this chance away."

"I suppose it would. And yet, Ruth, I hardly like your going to Mrs. Varoy. I have heard of her as being very overbearing and disagreeable, and I suppose you will have to go as resident governess?"

"Yes. I asked her if daily tuition would suit, but she said she required a governess who would live in the house."

"Well, there is this to be said, if you are not happy there you are not bound to stay."

"Of course not, mother."

"I do not know what I shall do without my sunbeam, or, for the matter of that, the boys either," the elder woman said, with a sigh.

"And, if I could, I would rather stay with you and the children, mother; but I only make a few shillings now occasionally, and the rent is getting in arrears. Remember there will be one month the less to feed when I am away, and fifty pounds a-year. I shall be able to send you the greater part of it, and I am sure you want it, you poor darling!" bending down to kiss her fondly.

"Unselfish as ever, my Ruth."

"And the boys, dear! They are getting beyond your and my tuition. What a great thing it would be if we could send them both to school."

"Yes. I own I have rather an objection to their going to a Board School, yet I fear there will be no help for it, unless—"

"Unless I make enough to send them to a private one. Do not be downhearted, mother, there is no knowing; this stroke of luck may lead to others."

"Heaven grant it, my child; we have seen a great deal of misfortune."

"Brighter days are in store for you, and all of us, mother mine; of that I feel assured."

But the elder woman only shook her head, and sighed mournfully, as her daughter moved away to change her walking attire.

She did not like to damp the young girl's enthusiasm, or throw cold water upon her unselfish hopes and expectations; but Fate

had dealt her so many hard knocks of late that it was no wonder that she should view things with desponding eyes, and fail to share Ruth's conviction that the silver lining was beginning to show through the dark cloud that had enveloped them.

Mrs. Grey, who, during the conversation with her daughter, had been busily engaged mending the clothes of her two boys, whose principal aim in life appeared to be to tear them, had been a beauty in her youth.

In spite of all that she had gone through she still retained traces of her former attractiveness.

She had been twice married. When very young—scarcely seventeen—to Ruth's father, a very wealthy man. He idolised his girl-wife, and lavished upon her everything that his love could suggest.

But his felicity was short-lived. He died three years after their marriage, leaving everything he possessed absolutely to his young widow, not settling anything upon his baby daughter—a circumstance which Mrs. Grey now often bitterly regretted; for had a fair sum been settled upon Ruth her second husband would have been unable to make ducks and drakes of it, as he had, unfortunately, of her whole property.

For several years she had remained steadfast to the memory of her first love, notwithstanding the fact that she had many offers, her fair face attracting suitors almost as much as her great wealth; but not one of them could tempt her to enter the state of matrimony a second time until she met Herbert Grey.

Handsome, fascinating, he came of a good but greatly impoverished family, and it was the wealth of the young widow that first attracted his attention. Gay, brilliant, elegant, a thorough man of the world, who never denied himself anything, it was a wonder to his friends and acquaintances how he managed to procure all the luxuries he indulged in.

Hunting, racing, betting, yachting, gambling at Monte Carlo and elsewhere, he was ever in the foremost rank of the extravagant gilded youth whose purses, as a rule, are larger than their brains.

He was ever a welcome guest in society's drawing-rooms, for society took him at his own estimate, and was unaware of the fact that its brilliant, petted darling was head-over-ears in debt, and was on the look-out for some rich heiress or wealthy widow to save him from utter ruin.

It was hardly to be wondered at that simple Mary Hilton was soon won over to believe that he was madly in love with her. His handsome face and engaging manner completely fascinated her, making her forget her resolution of never marrying again; and she consented to become his wife, thinking that her happiness was now assured, and that her second husband would prove as good a one as her first.

But the awakening came only too soon, and bitter it proved to the deluded wife.

At the time of her second marriage she had made over her property unreservedly to him, thinking that, of course, their interests now were identical, and she would trust him implicitly.

But Herbert Grey was a very different man from Bernard Hilton. He represented to his wife that he could easily double her wealth by clever speculation; and he artfully added that by this means Ruth might become a fabulously rich woman; and Ruth's mother, believing him and trusting him as she had trusted her first husband, let him have his way, and took no precautions to secure any of the wealth Bernard Hilton had left her, either to herself or his daughter.

Grey's first act when he found himself possessor of his wife's fortune was to pay off his debts, which were very heavy. He then plunged still deeper into extravagance and dissipation of every description, and at the end of five or six years of outward glitter and show, but inward anxiety to the unhappy wife, the crash came, and they were totally beggared.

Instead of then working and trying to retrieve their fallen fortunes, Herbert Grey basely deserted the trusting woman who had so confidently placed her all in his unscrupulous hands, leaving his two little sons without a care or word of farewell.

The shock so prostrated Mrs. Grey that she was helpless for some time after; and had it not been for Ruth, then a beautiful girl of eighteen, they would have come very near starvation.

With the small sum that could be scraped together from the sale of a few ornaments that had escaped from Grey's rapacious hands and the remnant of the furniture, she did a great deal.

She took a cheap lodging, to which she removed her mother and half-brothers. She cooked, she made her little brother's clothes, she taught them, as they could not afford to send them to school. She painted fairly, and managed to sell some of her water-colours, though she received wretchedly low prices for them. She was a good linguist and a musician of no mean excellence; and through Mrs. Camelot's kindness, who had known them in the days of their show and glitter, she was sometimes engaged to play at afternoon "at homes."

But still, in spite of all she could do, it was very difficult to make both ends meet. The modest rent was not always forthcoming, and there was sometimes a lack of food for the four mouths there were to feed, two of which were generally hungry, with boys' healthy appetites.

Ruth found that the absolute necessities of life cost a great deal more than she had any idea of formerly.

A rich man can cut down his expenses, a poor man can't. Superfluous luxuries may be suppressed, but not healthy appetites.

Under these circumstances, Mrs. Varcy's

offer of fifty pounds a-year, and her board and washing, seemed to the girl to be too good to be refused, and so she had combated her mother's objection to her acceptance of it.

When she returned to the sitting-room, she found that the boys had come in, and were clamouring for their tea, their appetites having been sharpened by the keen wind.

She busied herself to get the frugal meal, which was all they could afford; and as she watched her brothers devouring the bread and scrape with such gusto, she determined that it should not be her fault if in the future they had not something to supplement it, and stay their hunger with.

The boys, when they heard it, did not at all approve of the idea of Ruth's going away as governess. They were very fond of their half-sister. The youngest, Bertie, exclaimed, sidling up to her with a suspicious moisture about his blue eyes, which wanted very little provocation to him over in tears,—

"Don't want you to go, Ruth; want you to stay with us always!"

"I would if I could, dear!" Ruth said, taking up the curly-headed little rascal, and fondly kissing him. "But we have no money to pay the rent, and I must go and earn some."

"Why can't that nasty Mrs. Varcy pay the rent without taking you away from us?" demanded Bertie, adding viciously, "I 'ates her, I do!" forgetting to asperse his h's in his vehemence.

But Ruth let it pass this time, though she usually was very careful not to let the boys lapse in their grammar.

"She could not do that, dear, when I have not earned the money," she answered, gently.

"She's a nasty old thing, that's what she is!" Bertie said, defiantly.

"But, dear, I want to send both you and John to school, and I cannot do it without money."

"Don't want'to go to school!" he pouted.

"But you will like it when you get there, Bertie; that is," she added to herself with a half sigh, "if I am ever able to send you. They will make a clever man of you!"

"Don't want to be clever! I only want you!" persisted Bertie.

"Please, Ruth, I should like to go to school," here said the elder boy, John, who had been listening earnestly to the conversation between his brother and half-sister.

"Why would you like to go, when Bertie seems so much against it?" asked Ruth.

"Because, if they make me a clever man, I could earn heaps of money, and then you and mother need not work, but live in a fine house, and have beautiful things," replied the boy, his eyes glistening with enthusiasm.

"Well, dear," Ruth said, "I only hope that we may be able to send you to a good school, and then, perhaps, your ambition may be gratified."

"I am sorry to be obliged to part with you, even for a time, my darling!" Mrs. Grey said to her daughter, after the boys had gone to bed; "but I suppose it cannot be helped. I shall miss you terribly! You are our good angel! I do not know what I should have done without you all this dreadful time!"

"Now, mother, dear, you must not despond; let us look forward to brighter days. I shall come and see you every Sunday while the Varcys are in town. It is not a very great distance—at all events, not too far for me to walk to see my loved ones!"

"Yes, dear, that will be better than not seeing you at all; still I shall miss you through the week-days."

"You must help me to get ready my clothes."

"You ought to have some new ones, but I am afraid we cannot manage that."

"I shall do very well, mother, with what I have until my first quarter's salary is due, and you may be able to spare me a few of yours till then?"

"Of course, dear. You shall have anything of mine you choose to take. I have not much

left now. I wish I had, for your sake; still, there is a little real lace, and one silk dress, which, I daresay, we can manage to alter for you."

"But, mother, I do not like to take your one gown; I can get on very well without it."

"I would rather you had it, darling! It is not of much use to me now, I go nowhere. Come into the other room, and we will try it on."

It did not require much alteration, and, with the addition of a little lace, made a dress quite smart enough to be worn, should Ruth's presence be required, in Mrs. Varcy's drawing-room, when guests would be present.

"And now, my darling!" Mrs. Grey said, when the alterations were completed, "there is something you shall have that is worthy of you. I meant to give it you on your twenty-first birthday; but you are not far off that, and shall have it now. See, are they not beautiful?" and producing a morocco leather case she opened it, and displayed, to her daughter's wondering gaze, a beautiful necklace of rubies, set most exquisitely in Indian gold.

"Oh, mother!" was Ruth's enraptured comment, as she gazed at the sparkling jewels lying on their white velvet bed.

"They are your own property, dear; they belonged to your grandmother, Anabel Hilton."

"And you have kept them for me, mother!" Ruth exclaimed, half-reproachfully, though, woman-like, she could not help feeling a thrill of delight at the thought of being the possessor of such a beautiful ornament. "When you were in such straitened circumstances, why, these would have realised a large sum!"

"They were not mine to sell. I made no objection to my diamonds going when—when, you understand, dear!"

Even now Mrs. Grey could never speak calmly of her recreant husband, who had so basely deserted her and her boys, after stripping her of nearly everything she possessed; "but I would not allow your rubies—an heirloom in the Hilton family—to be swept away with the rest."

"Poor mother!"

Mrs. Grey went on. "I would not show them to you before because I knew you would sacrifice them at once for us."

"But, mother, they were yours?"

"No, dear; only mine in trust for you. Shortly after you were born, Ruth, your poor father brought that case of jewels to me."

"These are for our little Ruth," he said. "They have been in the family several hundred years, and there is a superstition connected with them, but I forget what it is; but anyway, Mary," he added, laughingly, "remember that these are for our little daughter. You may do what you like with your other jewels, but these must be Ruth's when she comes of age. Until then you may wear them, but you or she may never part with them." I looked upon them as a sacred trust for you. I now fulfil that trust by giving them to you; but, darling, remember, by your poor father's express injunction, you are not to part with them."

"I will not, mother, unless sorely driven, indeed, by want. I do not think I should be wronging him then by parting with them."

"Of course your father never had any idea of such a contingency happening; and but for my fatal folly it would never have arisen."

"I will not have you blaming yourself," Ruth cried, hastily, "you are everything that is good. There, mother, I want to try the effect of the jewels," clasping them round Mrs. Grey's neck. "They look beautiful; but oh! they would be rather incongruous things for a poor governess to wear. I do not think I will take them with me."

"Yes, dear, you had better take them; they are yours now. You may have some opportunity of wearing them; and, remember, though you may be a governess now, yet you are a Hilton, and the Hiltons can hold up their heads with the highest in the land."



So it was agreed that when Ruth went to Mrs. Varcy's the rubies should go with her.

Notwithstanding their poverty, Mrs. Grey was very much averse to the idea of Ruth going out as a governess; but the latter took a common-sense view of the matter, and talked her mother over to her way of viewing it, and painted the future so brightly that the smiles came back to Mrs. Grey's careworn face, and she began to share her daughter's roseate hopes.

In spite of her self-command, Ruth nearly broke down when the day came for her to take leave of her mother and brothers, the former of whom was weeping silently, but the latter noisily, both boys clinging to her, and loudly declaring that they would not part with her; and it was only by dint of promising Bertie a large horse and cart, that he had seen in a toy-shop window and longed for hopelessly, and John a volume of *Robinson Crusoe* out of the very first money she should receive, that she finally managed to escape from their detaining fingers, and after a last embrace from her mother, was fairly on her way to her new life.

## CHAPTER II.

MRS. VARCH was the wife of a rich city merchant. Mr. Varcy was a quiet, unassuming man, kind-tempered, and very fond of his children, whom he spoiled behind their mother's back—for it must be owned that he stood in awe of his better-half, though she had been a penniless girl when he married her, and was now as proud and overbearing as beggars are on horseback.

She was a portly woman of about forty, floridly handsome, and with an overweening opinion of herself and everything belonging to her, save and except only the before-mentioned husband, whom she snubbed on every possible occasion.

She quite ignored her own past poverty, and had a very great contempt for people less rich in worldly goods than herself, forgetting that she owed her diamonds, her horses, her carriages and all the other luxuries she enjoyed to her despised husband, whom she had married only and solely for his money.

For several years her family had consisted of one child, Marian; but when the latter was about ten years old, to the astonishment of everybody, twin little girls made their appearance on the scene.

It was these children who were to be Ruth's pupils. They were now turned seven, while their elder sister, Marian—a pretty, fair girl of seventeen, was to profit by Ruth's proficiency in music, to improve her own somewhat desultory acquaintance with the piano.

Mrs. Varcy fully determined that the "young person" she had taken out of charity to teach her daughters should be kept in her place—ignoring the fact that for accomplishments like those Ruth was able to impart she would have to have given three times the amount to masters.

She intended Ruth to be a sort of upper servant. She would have no nonsense of her being received as one of the family.

She knew perfectly well that Ruth Hilton's birth was higher than her own; but, as she was her paid dependent, with the vulgarity of a little mind she thought she had every right to snub her.

But Mrs. Varcy soon found that her governess was not to be so easily "sat upon" as her meek and good-natured spouse. Ruth was never forward or assuming, but her natural dignity enabled her to hold her own, and more than once Mrs. Varcy felt abashed when the girl's calm, clear eyes were fixed upon her in surprise when she commenced one of her tirades, and the employer instinctively felt that her paid dependent was immeasurably her superior.

Ruth possessed the art of making herself respected, and Mrs. Varcy inwardly chafed at the knowledge that she could not abash or put her in the wrong.

What added to her dislike was that the rest of her family seemed to have taken such a strong liking for the new governess.

Mr. Hilton, when he dared, showed her many little kindnesses, and tried to make her feel at home in his gorgeous house.

The twins, Ada and Edith, soon became greatly attached to her; she was so gentle yet so firm with them, and seemed to make the thorny path of learning easy to their youthful intelligences; but what vexed Mrs. Varcy more than all was the fact that Marian at once struck up a romantic friendship with Ruth; insisted on having her down in the drawing-room to play on every possible occasion when they had any visitors; treated her just as though she were a sister; and, in answer to her mother's remonstrances, declared that "she knew perfectly well Ruth's playing threw her into the shade, and she was perfectly sure their friends much preferred hearing a masterly rendering of Beethoven and Mozart to her jingle-jangle; and she, Marian, hated sharps and flats, and was not going to take the trouble of practising them," and, as she was somewhat of a spoiled child, having been the only one for several years, and, above all, not being the least afraid of her imperious mother, she generally managed to have her own way; and Ruth Hilton was made much of in a manner that fairly disgusted Mrs. Varcy, particularly as she found herself powerless to put a stop to Marian's folly.

Not that she had any fault to find with the progress the twins were making in their education. Indeed, the children got on wonderfully, for being fond of their governess they paid all the more attention to her instruction; and then they knew that if they were good, Ruth would tell them such wonderful fairy-tales, or dress their dolls so beautifully in their half-holidays!

Indeed, at such times they preferred remaining with her to going out in the carriage with their mother, she was so much more pleasant a companion.

Loving and understanding children she knew how to awaken their interest and sympathy. She told them all about her own little half-brothers, who were not much older than the twins themselves; and the little girls would have liked to have gone with her to see them, but this she would not permit, for she knew how angry it might make their mother were she to take them to the poor lodging which sheltered her own mother and the boys, and she had no wish that her pupils should get into hot water on her account; so Ada and Edith had to content themselves with sending John and Bertie toys and sweetmeats every time Ruth returned home.

On the whole Ruth Hilton's life was not unhappy in the Varcy's house.

True, the mistress of the mansion made herself as disagreeable as she could, but this was more than counterbalanced by the kindness shown her by the other members of the family. She found that she could send the greater part of her salary to her mother, for Marian was always making her presents, and would take no refusal. Now it would be half-a-dozen pairs of gloves, then a handkerchief sachet filled with fine lawn handkerchiefs or something similarly useful—presents that were given in so kindly a spirit that Ruth, in spite of her independence, felt it would be churlish to refuse when her acceptance of them gave such evident pleasure to the generous donor.

So the months went on, and Marian's eighteenth birthday was drawing near.

She was wild with delight, for she was to "come out" on that date, and a grand ball was to be given for her *début* by her father and mother.

Her head was filled with visions of forthcoming gaiety; she could not settle down to anything. It was in vain that Ruth urged her to take her music-lessons—she might as well have spoken to the winds. How could Marian sit down to strum—this was her own irreverent expression—the piano when there

were dressmakers to be consulted, wonderful shoes and gloves to be tried on, and the house generally to be put in a pleasant turmoil?

So Ruth turned her attention to her little charges, but even the schoolroom was not sacred from the inroads of the coming festivity.

One morning, while she was engaged with her pupils, Marian came with a rush like a whirlwind into the school-room, her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Put away the lesson-books this instant, you dear old thing. I want you to listen to me," she cried, impetuously.

"But surely your communication will wait till your sisters' lessons are over?" Ruth said, quietly.

"No, it will not; do as I tell you."

"But, Marian—"

"I will have no 'buts'; do as I say, and put the books away at once."

"If you are determined—"

"I am. You may as well shut up the books, for I will not let you teach!"

"There is no help for it, then, I suppose."

"None whatever."

"There, then," Ruth said, shutting up the books; while the little girls, nothing loth to have their lessons interrupted, looked at their sister with wide-open eyes.

"That is right. Now, are you not curious?"

"To hear your news? No, I do not think I am."

"And yet it concerns you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. Are you ready to listen?"

"I am all attention."

"Well, you know my birthday will be on the fourteenth?"

"Yes."

"And you know my coming-out ball is fixed for that evening?"

"Yes again."

"Well, this you do not know."

"What is that I am in ignorance of?"

"Why—but you must guess."

"What am I to guess?"

"Try and find out. Now, for guess number one."

"Is it that you will have a new dress?—but of course that is a settled thing."

"No; guess again."

"I give it up. I never was a good hand at guessing."

"I suppose I must tell you, as you will not guess. Well, then, I have ordered your gown from Madame Stephanie."

"My gown!" Ruth repeated, bewildered.

"Yes, it is to be exactly like mine—pure white, trimmed with real lilies-of-the-valley and orchids. Will it not be beautiful?"

"For you, dear, yes. It will just suit you. But of course I shall not appear at your ball."

"Of course you will!"

"My dear Marian!"

"I have ordered your dress, and most assuredly you will wear it at my coming-out ball on the fourteenth."

"But what does your mother say to this fresh freak of yours?"

"Oh, mamma was just wild at first; but I told her I had made up my mind that you should appear at my ball, and she had to give in. Besides, for a wonder, papa backed me up, said I should have my own way, and told me to order your gown at the same time as my own. So, you see, you must come, if only to please me."

"It is very kind indeed of you, Marian, to wish to give me this pleasure, only I am sorry your mamma should be vexed," said Ruth, gently.

She was more touched than she would have cared to own, for to the girl of two-and-twenty the prospect of a brilliant ball was very alluring, especially after the hardships she had endured.

"Then that is settled. I will take care that you have plenty of partners. But you must not fear that you will be classed among the wallflowers. I declare, Ruth, you will be the

prettiest girl in the room!" rattled on Marian, who had not a particle of jealousy in her composition.

"I imagine that will not be the opinion of the gentlemen when you are by," smiled Ruth.

"Oh! I am well enough," averred Marian, coolly. "But I know I am not half so handsome or so clever as you are; and that is what makes mamma so wild. She fancies you will out me out, and she hates to think that anyone else can be better than her own belongings."

"Marian, dear, do not be angry with me."

"What are you going to lecture me about now?"

"I do not want to lecture you, dear; but I do not think you should talk of your mother in that way."

"Have I shocked you, you prim old thing?"

"Well, Marian, I have always honoured my own mother."

"Oh! but yours is very different from mine. I did not mean to shock you; but it is quite true, nevertheless," and Marian danced away, leaving the occupants of the schoolroom to resume their interrupted studies with what attention they could bring to bear upon them.

The morning of the ball came at last.

"Lessons were not to be thought of," Ruth must give Ada and Edith a holiday," Marian declared, and, much to the little girls' delight, their sister managed to have her own way.

Lesson-books were banished for the day, and they were allowed to assist Ruth and Marian in the floral and other decorations, and even made surreptitious visits to the kitchen, where grand preparations for the supper were going on, and where the good-natured cook let them taste various of the dainties, and sent them away delighted with their hands full of bonbons, almonds and raisins, and crystallized fruits, which proceedings would have brought down Mrs. Varcy's wrath upon the heads of all concerned had she been cognizant of them; only, luckily, that pompous lady was too much engaged superintending the finishing touches being put to her own gorgeous costume by her maid to be aware of Ruth's heinous neglect of her duty in allowing her young charges to roam about, and so far forget what was due to themselves as her daughters as to descend to the kitchen and the company of the servants.

At length the evening arrived. All the preparations were completed. The twins sent off to bed, though they begged hard to be allowed to remain up to see the first of the arrivals; but their mother was inexorable on this point. She had had to give way in the matter of Ruth appearing at the ball, so she exercised her authority upon the unoffending little girls, and denied them the simple pleasure they craved.

When she was dressed Marian sent her maid to Ruth's room to render her any assistance she might require; but Miss Hilton had been accustomed to wait upon herself for some years now, and her toilette was almost completed before Ellen made her appearance.

"You do look lovely, miss!" the girl exclaimed, in open-eyed admiration. She had been accustomed to see the governess in sober greys and blacks, and the sight of her in a gown the counterpart of her young lady's, elegant in its expensive simplicity, fairly took away her breath.

"Ah! Ellen, fine feathers make fine birds sometimes," said Ruth, with a smile.

"Yes, miss, your dress is beautiful; just like Miss Marian's, and your gloves and even the fan just the same long white feathers! Why, miss, you might be sisters now you're dressed alike!"

"I am glad you approve of my dress, Ellen, for it was your young mistress who chose it," returned Ruth, taking up the magnificent bouquet of orchids which had been placed on her dressing-table. "I think I am ready now."

"Wait one minute, Miss Hilton."

"Well, Ellen, is there anything wrong?"

"Only, miss, you ought to have something round your throat. Miss Marian has her pearls, but I know she will lend you one of her other necklaces. I will go and ask her," the maid said, good-naturedly, and was going off on her errand when Ruth stopped her by saying,—

"You need not ask Miss Marian for one, Ellen, for I have one of my own if you really think I require it."

The maid's words had brought to her recollection the ruby necklace her mother had given her. Here, indeed, was an opportunity; and why should she not wear it? It would not look incongruous with her present attire. She took out the case containing the jewels and opened it.

"Ah! miss, but they are splendid!" exclaimed the admiring Ellen. "I do believe Mrs. Varcy herself has nothing half so handsome as those!"

"They are beautiful!" Ruth said, taking them from the case so that the light flashed upon them, bringing out their lovely colour.

"Let me fasten them for you, miss," Ellen said, and she clasped them round Ruth's white throat, where they glittered and scintillated like sparks of deep red fire.

"There, miss, you're just perfect," she declared. "I like them even better than Miss Varcy's pearls; they give just one touch of colour."

"Ruth, are you ready?" called Marian's fresh young voice at this juncture, and she came swiftly along the corridor to her friend's room, looking a fair enough vision in her airy ball-dress to gladden any man's heart, were he anyway a reasonable mortal.

"Yes, I am quite ready," replied Ruth.

"How well you look, Marian, dear!"

"And I can return the compliment. I never saw you look better! Did I not say you would be the best-looking girl in the room?"

"I am afraid you are a flatterer, Marian."

"No, it is true! But, oh!" catching sight of the necklace, "where did you get those lovely rubies? They must be worth a fortune!"

"Not quite," replied Ruth, smiling at her enthusiasm. "They belonged to my grandmother and great grandmother before her. In fact, they are a family heirloom."

"Ah! I knew you came of an old family, Ruth. I wish you would tell me about those jewels. I am sure there must be some history attached to them."

"I believe there is, but I do not know it. They have been in the Hilton family some hundreds of years. They are all that are left now of its former glory. My mother kept them for me when everything else was swept away."

"How nice it must be to have jewels like that, that belonged to our ancestors! Now mine," touching the pearls round her neck, "are quite modern. Papa bought them for me only a short time ago."

"But they are not less beautiful on that account. Listen, I think some of the guests are arriving."

"Then we had better go down at once," and together the young girls descended the staircase and entered the ball-room.

### CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Varcy, in a gorgeous costume of crimson velvet, was already receiving her guests. She glanced critically at the girls when they entered, and it was with a feeling of suppressed displeasure that she saw that Ruth, the despised governess, was the more striking-looking of the two.

Taller and slimmer than Marian, she moved with a peculiar elegance that would not have disgraced a duchess, while the high-bred features and dark loveliness quite threw Marian's fair prettiness into the shade.

Mrs. Varcy noted, too, with an ominous snap of the teeth, the ruby necklace Miss Hilton was wearing.

"She never came by that honestly I'll be bound, the designing minx," was her amiable, mental comment. "I do wish Marian would not be so absurd. She is actually introducing her to several young men. What a fool the girl is, just like her father! I can hardly believe that she is my daughter."

In spite of the hostess's private animadversions, the objects of them were both enjoying themselves with the zest of youth and innocence.

The rooms were rapidly filling with guests. The lavish decorations, the brilliant lights, the costly exotics, and the splendid costumes of the fair women who promenaded the rooms on the arms of attendant cavaliers reminded Ruth forcibly of the time, soon after her mother's second marriage, when she, too, was surrounded by a blaze of splendour; and the poverty that had since befallen Mrs. Grey and herself, through no fault of her own, seemed all the harder to bear for this glimpse back into the enchanted land. But Ruth Hilton was young, and youth soon shakes off sombre thoughts. She determined for that one evening to give herself up to the enjoyment of the pleasure Marian had so kindly provided for her.

Mrs. Varcy's feelings were the reverse of amiable as she saw the sensation her governess created, and the eagerness of the young men to secure a place on her programme. She angrily resolved that never again would she permit such folly on Marian's part. Why, two or three people had actually asked her, Mrs. Varcy, who that beautiful girl was? Beautiful, indeed. She could see no beauty in that white face, and she soon let the inquirers know that it was only her children's governess they were raving about.

But she could not proclaim this fact aloud to the crowd of young men who surrounded Miss Hilton the whole evening, and who had been introduced by Marian; and it was not the slightest use complaining to Mr. Varcy, who only said, in answer to his better-half's strictures on her conduct, "that he could see nothing wrong in her way of behaving. She was quite right to enjoy herself, and, for his part, he did not blame the young fellows for running after so pretty a girl."

So she had to put up with the mortification of seeing Ruth more sought after than her own daughter, in honour of whose birthday the ball was given. As for Marian, not the slightest feeling of jealousy troubled her. She was delighted at her friend's success, and religiously brought up to her every fresh gentleman who arrived—that is, provided he was a dancer.

When the evening was about half over, Marian came up to Ruth with a tall, fine-looking man by her side.

"Mr. Calthorpe begs for the honour of an introduction, Ruth," she said, adding, "I hope your card is not quite filled up?"

"I am afraid it is," Ruth replied, glancing at her programme.

"Let me see," exclaimed Marian, holding out her hand for the tablets in question. "Ah, yes, I can manage it. Here is Mr. Somers's name. He will not mind giving up one of his dances, I know."

"What a good fairy you are, Miss Varcy! You knew how anxious I was for a dance with your—"

George Calthorpe was beginning, when Marian exclaimed,—

"There is Harry, that is, I mean Mr. Somers," correcting herself with a blush.

"Now we will make it all right!"

"You have no objection, I hope, to the change of partners?" Mr. Calthorpe said, bending down over Ruth, while Marian was effecting the transfer with Mr. Somers—a transfer he would only allow on condition that her name took the place of Ruth's on his programme, to which arrangement the girl made very slight demur.

"Oh, no!" Ruth answered, wondering why



she felt the colour rise to her cheeks as she encountered the gaze from a pair of dark, grey eyes. "I only know Mr. Somers very slightly, and I do not think he will mind."

"Then it is my gain. There is the music beginning; and I believe this is the dance I am so fortunate to have secured. Shall we join the dancers?" he asked.

Ruth assented, and thought that never had she enjoyed a dance more than this, with the tall, rather grave-looking man, who was almost an utter stranger to her.

"You must be very fond of dancing, you dance so exquisitely!" Mr. Calthorpe said, when the music ceased, and he had found her a seat in a retired corner.

"Yes, I am fond of it," she acknowledged.

"I suppose you go out a great deal?"

"No. This is my first ball since I was a child. I used to dance a great deal then."

"Ah! I heard something of its being a coming-out ball. I suppose you know, Miss Ruth, that I have only been brought here to-night by a friend? I hardly know anybody in the room, so it is very kind of you and Miss Marian to take pity upon a lonely man like myself!"

"I am sure I—" Ruth was beginning, when Marian made her appearance, escorted by the indefatigable Mr. Somers.

"Ruth, I have been looking for you everywhere!" she cried.

"Well, dear?"

"Mr. Somers and I are going into supper, and we want you to come too."

"I shall be pleased to come with you!"

"Mr. Calthorpe," Marian continued, "are you engaged to take any lady into supper?"

"I have not that pleasure."

"Well, will you bring Ruth? I have ordered them to keep up a nice little table in the corner that will just take four. It will be ever so much pleasanter than at the large table; we can have all the fun to ourselves."

"That will be glorious, if Miss Ruth will permit me to escort her, but I fear I may be already forestalled."

"Have you any supper engagement, Ruth?"

"No, dear."

"Then come along, and see if we don't enjoy ourselves."

And Marian's prophecy was correct, for it would be hard to say, of the four gathered round that little table in the corner, which enjoyed him or herself most.

That single dance was not the only one George Calthorpe managed to secure with Ruth that evening.

As is often the case after supper, there was considerable confusion among the dancers, some declaring it was one number, some another; and, in consequence of this confusion, many of Ruth's partners came for the wrong dance, or did not turn up at the right time.

Profiting by this state of affairs, Mr. Calthorpe, who scarcely left Miss Hilton's side the whole evening, had three or four more dances with her than were legitimately his.

He was evidently struck with the beautiful girl, who was so entertaining, yet so unassuming.

The liking was mutual. Ruth thought she had never seen a nobler-looking man, and felt herself irresistibly attracted towards him, in spite of his being many years her senior.

When at last Ruth Hilton laid her head upon her pillow, agreeably tired out with the unwonted amusement of the evening, it was only in her dreams to see the soft look in the dark, grey eyes that had lingered so lovingly on her fair face, and to hear again in her sleep the deep, musical tones which had murmured gently in her waking ears.

The sun was high in the heavens the next morning ere she woke from her pleasant dreams, to find Marian standing by the bedside, smiling down upon her.

"What, up and dressed, Marian?" she exclaimed, astonished, for Miss Varoy, as a rule, was not given to early rising.

"Do you not know that it is past ten?"

the other returned, laughing at the amazement on her friend's face. "You lazy girl! However, it is my fault, for I would not allow them to call you, thinking you must be tired after the evening."

"What a good girl you are, Marian! But I must get up at once, because of the lessons."

"Oh! bother the lessons! I am not going to let you teach to-day, and so I told mamma."

"But, dear, the children?"

"They will not hurt for one day. I sent them off to the housekeeper's room, where, by this time, I should say, they are fairly on the road to make themselves ill with the 'goodies' Mrs. Price is stuffing them with."

Ruth could not help laughing.

"I hope, indeed, they will not make themselves ill," she said.

"Do them good," Marian declared. "But now make haste and dress, and when you are ready I will tell Ellen to bring your breakfast to my boudoir; everything is in a turmoil downstairs. I want to have a good long talk with you about the ball."

When both girls were seated in Marian's pretty room, which had been expressly settled to suit her taste by her father's orders, and after the dainty breakfast set had been cleared away, Marian settled herself comfortably in a lounging chair, and advised her friend to do the same.

"Well, Ruth, how did you enjoy yourself last night?" she said.

"Very much, indeed."

"So did I. It was awfully jolly!"

"Well, it certainly was jolly, if one may be allowed the expression; but I did not find anything 'awful' about it," smiled Ruth.

"Oh, you know what I mean," Marian returned. "I only hope all the balls I shall go to now I am 'out' will be half as nice."

"I hope so too; your 'coming-out' ball was certainly a great success."

"How do you like Mr. Calthorpe?" Marian asked, suddenly.

In spite of herself Ruth felt the colour flame up in her cheeks at this sudden mention of the person who was still the principal factor in her thoughts.

"How do I like Mr. Calthorpe?" she repeated. "I—I think he is very agreeable."

"Is that all?" Miss Varoy demanded, laughing. "Do you know, Ruth, that I am inclined to think you made a conquest last night?"

"Oh, Marian!"

"Yes, I am perfectly positive. Were I to ask Mr. Calthorpe what he thought of you his answer would be that he found you more than 'agreeable.' But seriously, dear, I should be very glad if he were to propose to you."

"Mr. Calthorpe would not think of doing that, especially after so short an acquaintance," said Ruth, covered in confusion, for fear that she might have been forward or unmaidenly for her friend to have so soon discovered the mutual liking that had sprung up between herself and the man to whom she had only been introduced so short a time before.

"I wish he would," Marian persisted; "and I will tell you why. Last night mamma did not know that Mr. Calthorpe is a very rich man, so did not take much notice of him. But one of her cronies has been here this morning and told her; and now, what do you think?"

"I cannot tell, dear."

"Why, mamma thinks he is just the husband for me. I know what that will be; he will be asked here, and I shall be thrown at his head at every turn."

"But, Marian," Ruth spoke with an effort, "if Mr. Calthorpe is a good man, and he looks as though there were nothing mean or ignoble about him—why should you object to him as a husband?"

"You dear, silly little goose! You are as blind as the proverbial mole! George Calthorpe is all you say, and more, he is a hero; but he is twenty years older than I am. And besides—"

"Besides?"

"I should not care for him as a husband, because—I love someone else!"

"Oh, Marian!" Ruth exclaimed, as a light suddenly broke in upon her. "Do you mean to say that Mr. Somers?"

"I do. We love one another; and, what is more, we mean to marry! I know papa will not object; he always says it is better to be happy than rich, and Harry is not rich, though he is comfortably off; and if mamma makes herself disagreeable we shall either run away and get married, or wait till I am of age, when she cannot interfere. You see now why I wish Mr. Calthorpe would propose for you."

"You said he was a hero. What has he done to deserve such a title?" asked Ruth, who could not help feeling glad that Marian's affections were engaged, and not to George Calthorpe.

"It appears he is a friend of one of Harry's friends, and the latter raves about him, calls him a hero, and I don't know what besides. Only, privately, I do not mind telling you that I much prefer Harry; Mr. Calthorpe is too grave and serious for me."

"Yes; but what heroic action did he perform?"

"Oh! he saved the lives of a hundred people or more, Harry's friend among the number."

"How?"

"He was on board a vessel that was wrecked. Harry's friend says it was terrible. The sea running mountains high, the wind roaring and wailing through the broken rigging and torn sails, the timbers creaking as the vessel was hurled by succeeding waves farther on the rock which was her destruction, the shrieks of the frightened women and children—all made up a picture of horror that he would not forget till his dying day."

"It must have been terrible, indeed!"

"Ay, a fearful time to pass through; and to add to the horror they could see people on the distant shore, though they could not render them the slightest assistance for the frightful breakers that rolled between them with such overwhelming force. Well, George Calthorpe volunteered to try and swim ashore with a rope when not one of the sailors would venture on so perilous an errand. Having tied a life-belt on, he plunged into the seething boiling waters amid the prayers of the women for his safety, the wild huzzahs of the men at a deed of daring that they could not emulate. It was a hard battle with the raging elements. Those left on board hardly dared watch the brave swimmer; his inevitable destruction seemed so imminent. Many a time he disappeared as they thought never to rise again. But still he struggled gallantly on through it all. The life was nearly battered out of him on the cruel rocks. You can see a scar he still bears on his forehead; but, bruised, bleeding, exhausted, and nearly dead as he was, he yet managed to get the line on shore."

"And the people were saved?" asked Ruth, who had listened to the narrative with breathless eagerness.

"Every one of them, down to a baby of a few months' old. Do you wonder now that Harry's friend calls George Calthorpe a hero?"

"No, indeed; but it is just what I can imagine he would do. Nothing cowardly could lurk beneath such an exterior."

"Ah! Ruth, I don't believe the admiration is all on his side. Before long I can see that a fresh governess will be wanted for the twins. Now, good-bye for the present, dear! I suppose I must go and see if mamma wants me to go out with her; only, remember, I count upon your assistance. I will not be thrown at Mr. Calthorpe's head," and kissing her, Marian ran gaily down the stairs, humming the tune of one of the waltzes which had been played the night before.

Left alone, Ruth gave herself up to a delicious reverie. Was it true that George Calthorpe really took an interest in her?

He had scarcely left her side the whole even-

ing; but then it did not follow that, because he had done so, he should have fallen in love with her at first sight, as Marian's words seemed to imply. It was folly to suppose it; she would think no more of the matter or of him. But though she came to this wise resolution, Ruth's thoughts were not to be so easily controlled, and she found herself again and again wondering when he would call, and hoping that she might have another opportunity of seeing the dark eyes and grave face of the man who had proved himself such a hero.

Ruth was fated to see him again. A day or two after the ball, when she was dressed to take the little girls for their morning walk, Marian entered the room and announced her intention of accompanying them.

"But will not Mrs. Varcy want you with her in the carriage?" inquired Ruth, it being that lady's usual custom to drive in the Row before lunch, and also again in the afternoon.

"Mamma is not going this morning," Marian answered. "She has a headache, so I told her that I would come with you for a walk. You like that, don't you, children?"

"Oh, yes!" chorused the little girls. They knew that their sister never refused to treat them to chocolates or caramels if they stopped before a confectioner's window, and were therefore delighted at the rare chance of going out with her.

After the confectioner's had been duly visited they turned into Kensington Gardens.

"We will go to the Ladies' Mile and see the equestrians," Marian said, and greatly to the little girls' pleasure they walked to the fashionable promenade.

Ruth usually, when out with her young charges, took the more retired walks in the gardens, so that Mrs. Varcy should have no fault to find with her—that amiable lady not being above the meanness of cross-questioning her children as to the governess's behaviour and actions when away from her personal superintendence.

They had been sitting under the shade of the trees for some time, watching the horses and their riders, and enjoying the ever-changing scene, the bright dresses of the lady pedestrians, and the soft balmy air, when a form appeared, sauntering slowly along that made Ruth's heart flutter with a sensation half fearful half delightful.

Would he recognise them? or would he pass by without raising his eyes in the direction in which they were seated?

"Look! Ruth! Look! There is Mr. Calthorpe!" Marian exclaimed; and at that moment the gentleman looking up saw them, and hastened forward with outstretched hands and smiling face to greet them.

"This is an unlooked-for pleasure, Miss Varcy," he said, shaking hands first with Ruth and then with Marian. "I did not expect to see you here to-day."

"We do not often come," Marian replied; "that is to say walking; mamma always prefers driving." She did not add that she had come in the hope of seeing Harry Somers, who had informed her that that was his usual morning walk.

"And who are these little ones?" George Calthorpe asked, appealing to Ruth, and indicating the twins, who were staring at him in open-mouthed and open-eyed wonder. "Sisters, I presume?"

He had spoken to Ruth, but it was Marian who answered him.

"I beg your pardon, I should have introduced them before. Yes; these are my twin sisters, Ada and Edith, whose powers in the way of consumption of chocolate are something wonderful to see!" and, indeed, the children's faces and fingers showed that they had not been idle since their sister had purchased the sweetmeats for them.

"I will make a note of that," Mr. Calthorpe said, laughing, "so that I may bring my welcome with me when I come to visit these young ladies."

"You will be sure of a genuine one if you

bring a box of sweetmeats in each pocket," returned Marian.

"Do you not think we had better be returning?" Ruth here asked, timidly.

"I suppose we had; it is nearly the children's dinner-hour," Marian said, glancing at her watch.

"May I be allowed the pleasure of escorting you home?" Mr. Calthorpe asked, looking at Ruth, who would have declined, only she was forestalled by Miss Varcy acquiescing, as though it were a matter of course.

They had hardly risen from their chairs when they came face to face with Harry Somers, who, as he eagerly explained to Marian, had been unexpectedly detained, and had only that moment made his way to the park.

Gradually Marian and Harry dropped behind, leaving George to walk at Ruth's side, who felt a strange, half fearful happiness in this near proximity to the man she was unconsciously learning to love, in listening to his liquid tones, that seemed to take a deeper meaning when he addressed her.

They were practically alone, for the lovers were some way behind, and the twins were running about in front, gathering daisies or chasing each other.

That was a memorable walk to Ruth, and all too soon was it over and the door of the Varcy mansion reached.

But this was not the only time that George Calthorpe or Harry Somers met them in the Row and escorted them home.

Marian often insisted on Ruth's coming with her after this; and sometimes it would be one gentleman, sometimes the other whom they met, and occasionally both.

At first Ruth had remonstrated with Marian about these meetings, for though they were deliciously sweet her nature was too truthful to in any way countenance anything underhand or clandestine. But when Miss Varcy averred that her mother knew that they occasionally met both gentlemen and did not disapprove, she gave herself up to the delight of the hour, and she could not but own to herself that she looked forward as eagerly to meeting George Calthorpe as Marian did to seeing Harry Somers; and the days when he did not appear seemed to lose their brightness, and were blank and dreary indeed, though the sun might be shining as brilliantly, the birds singing as sweetly, and the flowers blooming as fragrantly as before. The change was in herself, and not in the external day, though she did not know it.

Once or twice she had fancied Mr. Calthorpe had addressed her as 'Miss Varcy,' but of this she was not quite certain, as he usually called her Miss Ruth, and in her happiness she let the matter pass. But the circumstance was recalled by an incident that occurred not long after her acquaintance with that gentleman had ripened into something deeper than mere friendship.

She was to be rudely awakened from the dream of possible happiness along which she had allowed herself to drift without thought of coming misfortune.

#### CHAPTER IV.

It was quite true that Mrs. Varcy knew of the meetings in the Row; but she fondly imagined that the rich Mr. Calthorpe was attracted by her daughter, and she particularly wished to get him as a son-in-law.

She made not the slightest objection whenever Marian announced her intention of going for a walk with the children and their governess instead of driving in the carriage with herself.

Of Harry Somers she never thought, or if she did, she deemed him a nonentity from whom there was nothing to fear. A man with only eight hundred a year would never dare to raise his eyes to her daughter. So she permitted, without interference, those morning walks which were so perilously sweet to both

Marian and Ruth, and had she but known it were so fraught with disappointment and vexation for herself.

Not knowing that George Calthorpe was a wealthy man when he had been introduced to her on the night of the ball, she had paid very little attention to him, or she might have seen how much he had been struck with Ruth Hilton, and so probably saved herself a good deal of mortification and humiliation; but she had not noticed and was hugging herself with the delusive idea that everything was going just as she could have wished.

Like a thunderbolt came the revelation of the truth to her. She had been so certain that ere long she would have the pleasure of counting the wealthy Mr. Calthorpe as her son-in-law.

Once or twice she had graciously invited him in to lunch, and on one of these occasions he asked Mrs. Varcy's permission to arrange a boating picnic.

Of course this was smilingly accorded.

He settled that he would drive them down to Richmond on his drag, then they would hire a boat and come back to a dinner at the Star and Garter, before he drove them home in the cool of the evening.

He expressly stipulated that the twins should be included in this programme; it need hardly be said, much to their satisfaction.

The scheme met with Mrs. Varcy's approval, because she thought it was a sign that Mr. Calthorpe meant business, and would very shortly propose for her daughter, and besides this, there would be the glory of appearing on a well-appointed drag before the eyes of her neighbours, and this counted for something with the purse-proud woman, for though she had carriages and horses, yet Mr. Varcy did not keep a drag, and therefore it was gratifying to her pride the idea of appearing on Mr. Calthorpe's.

Both Marian and the little girls were in a state of excitement over the proposed excursion.

The elder girl would have liked to have included Ruth and Harry in the party, but, as Mr. Calthorpe had not specified them by name, she knew her mother too well to dream of broaching the subject to her.

Privately, Marian thought that Mr. Calthorpe intended to include Ruth, but she had no opportunity of sounding him on the subject, and, Mrs. Varcy so totally ignoring the governess, she knew it would be worse than useless appealing to her.

Events showed that Marian was right in her surmise, and that George Calthorpe had fully intended Miss Hilton should be of the party.

On the appointed day his splendidly-horsed drag drove up to the door, and, after the grooms had gone to the horses' heads, he alighted and entered the house. Mrs. Varcy was ready, bridling with pleasure to play the part of chaperon.

Marian was there, looking very fair and pretty in her white dress, and shady hat, and the twins, their eyes sparkling at the anticipated pleasure; but George Calthorpe looked in vain for the one sweet face he only cared to see.

"We are quite ready," Mrs. Varcy said, sweetly, seeing that he waited after he had shaken hands all round.

"But—Miss Ruth?"

"Eh!"

"Miss Ruth."

"What of her?" an ominous frown contracting the lady's eyebrows.

"Are we not to have the pleasure of her company?"

"Certainly not!" very stiffly indeed.

"But, Mrs. Varcy—"

"Really, Mr. Calthorpe, I am astonished at your asking such a thing."

He looked up, surprised at her tone.

"Indeed!" he said. "Why, I made up the party chiefly for her. I thought you understood that. I am sure she would enjoy herself."

"Oh yes, she would," Marian cried, before



Mrs. Varoy could speak. "I will go and fetch her."

A sharp "Marian, stop where you are!" from her mother stayed her as she was on the point of leaving the room in search of her friend.

"Mamma, do let me go," she pleaded.

"No, indeed!" Mrs. Varoy said, angrily. "I never heard of such a thing. This is all your fault, Marian, making such a fuss over that girl. You've given her grand, stuck-up ideas; that sort of people should be kept in their places."

"Miss Ruth! Why, what is she?"

"My children's governess. It was very reprehensible of Marian not to have told you. You could have guarded against the creature's machinations then. I am sure I would have told you had I known that you were in ignorance of her social position."

"Your children's governess? I thought she was your daughter!" George Calthorpe said, in genuine astonishment.

"My daughter! My daughter! my daughter!" was all the irate and insulted lady could ejaculate, as though she were annihilated at the very thought of such an unheard-of, such a horrible mistake.

"Certainly thought she was your eldest daughter," Mr. Calthorpe returned, calmly, though there was an amused look in his eyes as he surveyed Mrs. Varoy's indignant and apoplectic-looking face.

Forgetting her suavity in her rage, that lady tore violently at the bell, and, on the footman appearing with prompt celerity, she ordered Miss Hilton to be called down.

She could hardly contain her passion while waiting for the unconscious offender. She would have liked to vent her spleen and disappointment upon George Calthorpe himself, but something in that gentleman's manner and bearing stopped her, and she reserved the whole of her wrath for poor Ruth's shoulders—that bold-faced minx who had upset all her cherished calculations.

"So, Miss Hilton," she began, almost before the girl had entered the room, "what have you to say in extenuation of your conduct?"

"My conduct?"

"Don't repeat my words, miss, like a parrot. I say your conduct—your discreditable conduct."

"I—I do not understand."

"Don't try your innocent airs on with me; they won't pay, though they have taken others in. You—you are a viper, that I lodged and warmed. I took you in charity out of the gutter, and this is how you repay me, by base ingratitude!"

"What have I done?" asked Ruth, raising her large eyes in astonishment to Mrs. Varoy's face, which was the colour of a peony.

"What have you done, you innocent-looking schemer? What have you not done?" screamed the irate woman.

"I do not understand you, Mrs. Varoy!"

Ruth said, with quiet dignity.

"Oh! you don't, don't you," she jeered.

"You ignore your scandalous conduct in passing yourself off as my daughter."

"Mrs. Varoy, I—"

"You know you did, and it was for the purpose of gaining the affections of a rich man, who would not even have looked at you had he been aware that you were only my paid servant."

"Indeed, Mrs. Varoy, I protest against such statements," George Calthorpe said, hotly; but there was no stopping the flow of her denunciations against the girl.

"You led my innocent daughter on to make clandestine appointments. You accept valuable presents from gentlemen. Altogether, you are not a fit person to associate with my children, and I request that you will leave my house at once!" and Mrs. Varoy paused, not from lack of words, but from lack of breath.

Ruth stood stunned under these humiliating accusations, which she felt were wholly undeserved, but which were none the less hard

to bear in the presence of the man she had learned to love.

For a moment she was speechless, and then, as Mr. Calthorpe moved over to her side, the same kindly light in his eyes as he gazed at her pale face as before he knew her position, she found courage to say,—

"I had no idea that Mr. Calthorpe did not know my real position in this house."

"I am perfectly certain of that," he said, reassuringly.

"Ah!" sniffed Mrs. Varoy, incredulously.

"And as to leading your daughter to make clandestine appointments," Ruth went on, emboldened by the knowledge that he at least would not misjudge her, "she will bear me out when I say that I only countenanced the walks in the Row after she told me you quite approved of them."

"Yes, it is quite true, and you know it, mamma," began Marian, impetuously, when Ruth said, gently,—

"Let me finish, dear!" Then turning to her mother, "As to your last accusation, Mrs. Varoy, it is totally untrue. I never received a present from a man in my life!"

"Very likely," sneered Mrs. Varoy. "Then pray, how did you become possessed of that costly ruby necklace that you wore at the ball? You never got that in a legitimate manner, I'll be bound. Your wages would not buy them!" she added, coarsely.

For the first time during the interview tears started to Ruth's soft eyes.

"Those jewels my poor mother kept for me during all her trials," she answered, quietly.

"They were the only things left of my father's fortune; those jewels that had belonged to the women of successive generations of his family, and which he bequeathed to her in trust for me."

Mrs. Varoy sniffed more vigorously and incredulously than ever. She did not know who her own grandfather was, and this sounded like an impossible assertion of Ruth's.

"You had better pack up at once and go. I am not to be taken in with your plausible tales," she said.

Without a word Ruth turned to leave the room, when a detaining hand was laid upon her arm, and George Calthorpe's low, deep tones fell on her ear.

"Miss Ruth—you will still let me call you that? I cannot tell you how distressed I am at having been the cause of giving you pain."

"You are not in the least to blame, Mr. Calthorpe."

"You forgive me then? and you will not let this unfortunate occurrence put a stop to our friendship?" And in spite of knowing that Mrs. Varoy's envenomed eyes were on them both, he possessed himself of one of her hands, and kissed it with as much respect as though she were a duchess.

"Did you hear my orders, Miss Hilton?" she snarled. "Perhaps you will obey them when you have done philandering."

George Calthorpe cast one withering look of contempt at the vulgar woman as Ruth slowly went out of the room, Ada and Edith clinging to her, crying and declaring that their dear Ruth should not be sent away.

When the trio had disappeared Marian turned indignantly to her mother.

"How could you say such unkind things, mamma, when you know they were not true?" she said.

"How was I to know they were not true?" inquired Mrs. Varoy, who was dimly conscious she had not appeared in the most favourable light before the man she had hoped to gain for a son-in-law.

"Why, mamma, you know you never objected when I told you we were going to the Row, and that we often met Mr. Calthorpe and Mr. Somers there," exclaimed Marian, much to her mother's discomfort.

"That was different!" she said. "How could I tell that the designing minx would not keep her place, but go passing herself off as one of her betters? It all comes of your folly,

Marian, in dressing her up, and treating her like your sister."

"She is not designing!" Marian answered, indignantly. "And as for her birth, it is a great deal better than ours. I have heard all about her from the Camelots. I only wish she was my sister!"

"Marian, you forget yourself!" Mrs. Varoy said, loftily sailing from the room without vouchsafing the slightest recognition to Mr. Calthorpe.

Marian turned to him when her mother had gone.

"You must not believe what mamma said about Ruth. She is an angel if ever there were one on earth. She keeps her mother, and her two little half-brothers entirely, though it was her stepfather who spent all her mother's and her own money. The Camelots told me so," she said, breathlessly.

"I believe Miss Ruth to be everything that is good and noble in woman, and what you say, Miss Varoy, only confirms that impression," he replied, smiling down at the eager little champion of his darling. "Her name, I think your mother said, is Hilton!"

"Yes! It was my fault that you did not know it before. I always call her Ruth!"

"Yes! I quite thought you were sisters. You see you were dressed alike the first time I saw you, save that you wore pearls and Miss Hilton had those magnificent rubies round her throat. I think the mistake was excusable, do not you?"

"Quite excusable. Ruth certainly looked more like a countess than a governess; but then her birth is very good indeed."

"Miss Marian, you will give me your friend's address?"

"Most certainly I will!"

"Perhaps the next time I see you, Miss Varoy, I may have something to tell you concerning Ruth and myself," he said, smiling, when he had carefully written down Mrs. Grey's address in his pocket-book.

"I can guess!" laughed Marian. "Ruth will want me for a bridesmaid, and I will come in spite of mamma!"

"Wish me luck in my wooing, Miss Varoy, and I will wish you the same happiness as I hope to enjoy myself ere long," and then seeing Marian's confusion at this home-thrust, he quickly added, "I am afraid our boating-party will not come off to day after all; but it is only postponed. I still hope to have the pleasure of taking you and your sisters on the proposed excursion; but then Ruth shall welcome you too. Before I go let me thank you for your brave championship of her. As long as I live I shall remember and be grateful to you for it."

And cordially wringing her hand, he strode out of the room and down the steps, where the four boys were impatiently champing their bits, pawing the ground, and giving their grooms enough to do to hold them, having become very restless at their master's unusual delay; and if horses can think at all they must have been rather surprised to find their heads turned homewards without having the spin for which they had prepared themselves.

A morning or two after Ruth was sitting in the tiny parlour of the cheap lodgings to which she had returned.

She was thinking sadly of the unfounded accusations of Mrs. Varoy, and of the effect they must have had upon the man, who, she was obliged to own to herself, she had learned to love.

It was folly, she knew, worse than folly, now when he must despise her for an adventuress and impostor; but she had drifted into loving him unawares.

Well, this was a dream of the past; she must root it up and turn her attention to trying to earn enough to keep the wolf from the door. She sighed when she thought of what a hard task that would be now.

Mrs. Varoy had not given her any money when she so summarily dismissed her, though there was nearly a quarter's salary due, and the girl wondered dimly how she, her

mother and young brothers were to live until she could succeed in getting some employment.

Her sorrowful meditations were interrupted by the little maid-of-all-work belonging to the establishment, opening the door, and announcing, "A gentleman ter see yer, miss!" and, ushering in, without further ceremony, the very man who was occupying the larger share of her thoughts.

Ruth looked up, and her pale face became suffused with burning blushes as she saw him advancing towards her with an outstretched hand and a look in his eyes which made her heart beat flutteringly.

"Miss Hilton, Ruth, tell me I am not unwelcome—that my presence here does not displease you?"

Ruth murmured something, she scarcely knew what. The memory of Mrs. Varcy's accusations covered her with shame and confusion.

He saw it, and his indignation against that amiable lady did not decrease at the sight of his love's distress.

"Ruth," he continued, tenderly, "will you forgive me for having been the unlucky cause of bringing down unmerited abuse on your devoted head? My darling, you must have seen that I love you!"

A sudden wave of joy swept over Ruth as she listened to his impassioned words.

Could it be true that he loved her, poor and despised as she was? Was not this some dream, from which she would awake to find the stern reality of loveless poverty?

But no; he was there in the flesh, pouring out his words fast and eagerly.

"My darling, I have come to ask you to be mine—my own loved wife! Let me shield you always from attack, calumny, and harm! Give me the right to guard you from the whole world?" he said.

She could scarcely believe this great happiness had come to her; yet, here he was, pleading earnestly that she would bless him with her love.

He loved her! What more of earthly bliss could this world hold?

But, ah! he did not know. There were her mother and her half-brothers. She could not leave them, and all the new-found gladness died out of her face as she turned to him.

"I am very sorry, but I cannot be your wife!" she said, slowly, and with effort.

"But why?" he said. "Is it that I am too old for you? I am nearly double your age, I know; yet I love you, ay, with my heart's best love! Do you know, Ruth, that if you send me from you you will make my whole life desolate? Yet—yet I will not persist in my demand if you say you cannot love me. Is that the reason of your refusal? Do you think me presumptuous?"

"Oh! no, no! it is not that!" she sobbed.

"Is there someone else?—someone who has gained that for which I would give my life?"

"No! no!" she repeated.

"Then what obstacle is there to my gaining this little hand?" taking it as he spoke. "Understand me, Ruth, I would not take your hand unless your heart could accompany the gift; but if, as I hope and believe, you are not indifferent to me, why should we part?" he questioned, gravely.

"My mother and brothers," she faltered at last.

"What of them?"

"I—I could not leave them."

"Is that your only reason for refusing me?" he asked, his face brightening.

"I—think—so," she murmured, her eyes falling beneath his earnest regard.

"My darling! mine!" he cried in ecstasy, drawing her towards him, and pressing his lips to her white brow. "That need never part us! Your mother shall be mine, and your brothers also! I will not separate you from those you love!"

"But we are so poor!" she objected timidly. "I am not fit to be your wife!"

"You are fit to be an empress, my darling!" he returned, fondly; "and do not talk of being

poor. Why, your ruby necklace is a fortune, even if your face were not, which, in my eyes, it is—a fortune that a king might envy my possession of!"

"Ah, you flatter me!"

"I do not. Ruth, is it to be 'yes'?"

Ruth blushed, but her tongue refused to answer.

"Say 'yes,' darling. I shall not believe you are my very own unless your lips tell me so. Say the word that will give you to me for aye. Will you be my wife? Answer, darling!"

Soft and tremulous came the words,—

"Yes! I will be yours till death parts us!"

and as he gathered her into his arms her head rested on his breast, and a great content and happiness enveloped her.

"I cannot tell you, my darling, how thankful I am that you are not the daughter of that odious woman!" George Calthorpe said, after an interval of bliss that was too great for words.

"Are you, really?" she asked, lifting her great eyes to his.

"Really and truly. I must have been blind, indeed, to have for one instant imagined that you could be any relation of hers! You are as dissimilar from her as day from night!"

"But Marian is her daughter."

"I admit Marian is a clever little girl, and a staunch and faithful friend; but, ugh! the idea of that frightful, vulgar woman as a mother-in-law! How can I thank you enough for having saved me from the fate of being her son-in-law?"

"Yet you say you would have married me all the same had I indeed been her daughter?"

"Yes, Ruth, I would have married you were there fifty Mrs. Varcys to be encountered; but, still, I am thankful for my escape."

"Poor Mr. Somers!"

"Why do you pity him?"

"Because I think before long he will occupy the position you deprecate so much."

"Is it so?"

"Yes, Marian told me herself."

"Well, he is a good fellow, and she deserves to be happy; but I do not envy him the prospect of having such a mother-in-law. Darling, have you forgiven me for the mistake I made in taking you for Mrs. Varcy's daughter?"

"It was not your fault."

"Perhaps not. Please Heaven life shall be fair for you henceforth—fair as I can make it. Crosses may come, but we will surmount them together. Nothing can harm those who love truly; and oh, Ruth! I wonder if you understand the depth and fervency of my love? Turn your eyes to mine, that I may learn in their liquid depths the truth and constancy of yours."

Ruth obeyed, and, apparently, the answer he read in those soft dark orbs satisfied him, for once more he drew her closely to him, and rained kisses on the fair face nestled so confidently on his breast.

Mrs. Varcy's opinion of her late governess altered considerably when she heard that the wealthy Mr. Calthorpe had actually married her.

As Ruth had a splendid estate in the country, besides a town house that was twice as large as her own, diamonds a great deal more valuable, equipages and horses more numerous, and a retinue of servants double in number, Mrs. Calthorpe became a person of great importance in Mrs. Varcy's eyes.

She would go about to her acquaintances saying, "That sweet Mrs. Calthorpe was so handsome, so fascinating, and so condescending. She was such a very great friend of theirs; she would have the dear girls to stay with her on such long visits," &c.

A statement partly true and partly false.

True, inasmuch that Ruth Calthorpe's friendship with Marian Somers never wavered; and she often invited the little girls, Ada and Edith, to stay with her.

False, because since the day she left Mrs.

Varcy's house she had never set foot inside it.

Nor was that time-serving lady ever included in the invitations which were cordially extended to her daughters.

As to George Calthorpe, he never regretted the mistake he made, and which he always declared led to his marrying the sweetest wife in the world!

[THE END.]

## FAIRY GIFTS.

—101—

A SLIGHT, girlish form moved to and fro to the monotonous whirr of a huge, old-fashioned spinning-wheel. It was a pretty picture that Eileen made, from the mass of short, dark curls crowning her small head to the tiny bare feet pacing across the neatly-swept clay floor of the humble cottage.

But the sunny smile which usually looked out of the large, deep-set blue eyes, and lurked in dimples around the red, full, yet delicately-cut lips, was no longer there. In its place was an expression of sadness out of keeping with the rosy, winsome young face. Now and then, with an impatient gesture, she dashed away a tear which welled up and hung like a drop of crystal upon her long, shadowy lashes.

But suddenly every thought and emotion was merged into an absorbing feeling of astonishment, for a vision had come to the open door, and paused upon its threshold, which was surely too beautiful and dazzling to belong to one of mortal birth.

She was tall and stately, with a fair, proud face, and was dressed in a robe of shimmering pale green silk, trimmed with shining lace, while upon her wavy, yellow hair rested a hat of the same colour, dotted over with gleaming spots of gold, as was also the long, drooping, white plume which curled over its wide brim.

After one startled, wondering glance, Eileen made her escape, scattering, in her hasty flight, the snowy piles of carded wool placed near the wheel.

The intruder looked after her for a moment, with a surprised but merry light in her bright eyes, then she entered and quietly seated herself, to await her return; and Eileen, not hearing any sound, stole softly to the door and peeped in, meeting, to her great dismay, a glance from the great violet eyes of the resplendent being, who beckoned her to come near.

Much as this girl stood in awe of this evidently supernatural visitant—probably the queen of the fairy realm—she dared not disobey the call; so she came slowly toward her, and stood with bowed head awaiting her pleasure.

"Why did you run away?" asked a sweet, ringing voice.

Eileen dropped a frightened courtesy as she stammered,—

"I'm not used to fairy-folk, your ladyship, and—and—"

With an amused smile as the cause of the girl's flight was thus made clear to her, the young lady said,—

"How do you know I belong to the elfin people?"

With an awed, admiring look up into the lovely young face, and down over her rich dress, Eileen answered,—

"Sure, it is easy to see that! None but one of that sort would wear a kirtle spangled over with stars, and a feather on her hat whose snow seems dotted with sunshine. Though I thought before that the tallest of them was no higher than my thumb, and you as big as I am."

"Why were you crying when I came in?"

"Everything has gone wrong," answered Eileen, with a sudden quiver in her voice.

"Father's sheep were bitten to death by a dog, and our three cows took sick and died, and Bridget O'Connell says Brian shall marry



Kathleen, the rich miller's daughter; and Brian was my lover; that's why I was crying my heart out."

"If a lover is false, one is well rid of him." "But Brian's not false! He wants me to run away with him to America. But I'll not bring a curse upon him; for, disobedience to parents is a deadly sin. I'll never speak to him again unless his old mother begs me to."

"That is the right spirit, if you can only carry it out. I suppose you'll take up with some other fine lad, and so punish the mother by making the son unhappy."

Eileen turned one flashing, indignant look upon her questioner. Then she recollected herself, and answered, humbly,—

"I'd not have the heart to do that! I'd sooner lie down and die than have Brian think me false!"

"How rich is the young man? Can you tell me?"

"Oh, he's as rich as—as anything! Let me see, pausing and saying over to herself some names, and counting them upon her fingers, until she had assured herself that she was right. "There are six cows, and twelve shoats, and no end of hens and chickens, and a patch of land. Oh! Brian is very rich!"

"And you /—what have you?"

"I've just my two hands—nothing more!" And Eileen held out the despised members with a deprecating gesture, the rosy, dimpled palms upward.

"Well, if your hands were cut off wouldn't you give a fortune to have them back again?"

"Yes," said Eileen, a little doubtfully.

"So you, too, are rich; don't you see?" Then with a glance round the room, the inquisitive visitor continued: "Do you live here all alone?"

"No; father is away getting cuttings from the bog meadow for the winter's fire."

Then the lady said:

"I think you are a good girl, and I will give you a sovereign to buy a dress with."

Eileen watched her with dazzled eyes as she drew a shining coin from a dainty purse which held a goodly number of companion pieces, as she could see through its silken meshes.

"Please," she said, hesitatingly, "if you've no objections, I'd rather take it for a cow; then we'd have milk for the father's porridge?"

"But one gold piece will not buy a cow."

The eager face clouded, to brighten again at the next words:

"Still, as a fairy's visit would be of little value unless she could gratify a wish, you shall see a cow at your door to-morrow morning. But you must do as I say, and buy your stuff for the making of a white dress, and have it all ready to put on by this time next week. I shall send you an invitation to a grand moonlight festival, and no one knows what might come of it, if you should attend. The fairy king himself might put his powers at your service. Good-bye," and with a smile which warmed Eileen's heart like sunshine her beneficent guest departed.

As Eileen looked after her as she stepped lightly across the meadow she raised her hand to her eyes to shade them from the light and satisfy herself that she saw truly. She had caught a glimpse of a snow-white palfrey, and of a tall figure dressed in dark livery with yellow facings, and decked with gilded buttons and with high-top boots reaching to his knees. Bending low, he offered his hand for the tiny foot of his mistress. A light spring, and the next moment horse, rider and attendant were hidden from sight by a sudden bend in the road.

As Eileen returned to her work it was not to be wondered at if, for a time, the yarn played her strange tricks of tangling and breaking. But she cared not. Her mind was too full of what she had seen and heard for her to be impatient, and after a while she succeeded in spinning a thread so fine and even it would have answered for the clocked hose of the Queen herself.

A few miles from Eileen's home stood a fine old castle, the property of the hereditary lord of the soil from a time dating back far into the past. It had been unoccupied for several years, the present owner being a gay, *debonair* man, who loved scenes of brilliance and splendour, and so had preferred to reside abroad, leaving his ancestral domain to the care of his steward. Now, however, great preparations had been made of late to celebrate the return of the family. Carpenters, masons, and upholsterers had been in full force at the castle for weeks. But Eileen had been too much engrossed with the troubles and trials of her own little world to leave the cottage for a gossip among the young folk of her acquaintance, and was ignorant of what was an absorbing topic of interest to most of the tenants upon the estate.

So it was in full keeping with the idea she had already conceived of her beautiful and wonderful visitor, when one morning at her door appeared the same tall, grave being, in his dark uniform, set off by gay facings and bright buttons, who had led up the snow-white palfrey to his mistress, and had assisted her to mount.

He handed her a perfumed note, with a monogram surmounted by a coronet stamped upon one corner, and said,—

"My mistress requests you to be at the castle at five o'clock on Wednesday."

"Is it in the morning or the evening, your honour?" asked Eileen, timidly, conquering her awe of the majestic personage.

Not holding the key to her thought that a fairy-ring ought to be at the witching hour of midnight, the man gave her a wondering stare. Then he said,—

"My lady would not be apt to receive company at sunrise. You are to come in the afternoon."

Eileen watched him until he was out of sight. Then she kissed the dainty note, and laid it away unopened among her few treasures. As she could neither read nor write, its delicate tracery was as unintelligible to her as so many cabalistic symbols.

But the messenger's verbal invitation was clear; and her heart throbbed with almost painful excitement as she thought of it. It was truly an awesome thing to be asked to a fairy queen's festival!

She had bought and made the white dress as commanded, and when she had concluded her simple toilet, using for a mirror a spring of clear water which had widened into a crystal pond at the rear of the cottage, she hardly recognised the graceful maiden it reflected back to be herself. On her way to the castle she exchanged nods and smiles with groups of acquaintances bound in the same direction.

Many an admiring rustic cast a glance at the winsome maiden as she passed, dressed in her simple but tasteful robe of white, with no ornament save the band of bright ribbon which threaded her dark curls.

Brian and his mother were among the throng, and his black eyes sought her face reproachfully as she went on without deigning to notice him.

Her sensitive pride had been too deeply wounded for her to allow the old mother's keen eyes to see a trace of the real feeling which filled her loving heart almost to bursting, so intense was her longing to hear Brian's voice once more say, in its soft, deep tones, "Eileen, mavourneen, I love but you!"

So she counterfeited, but too successfully, the opposite extreme; and poor Brian almost wondered if it could be the same Eileen whose rosy lips had been pressed by his own at the time of their betrothal—that happy period, now, alas! so far distant.

The guests had all come from far and near, and were gathered in the great banquetting hall of the castle, when a sudden murmur swelled through the assembled multitude. A stately gentleman had entered, with a young, exquisitely beautiful girl leaning upon his

arm. She was dressed in a sheeny dress of azure silk, blue as her own starry eyes, whose trailing folds swept the floor in a long train. Sparkling gems glittered from a rich necklace which clasped her round throat, and scintillated from a butterfly ornament quivering in her golden hair. It was their young lady—the daughter of their fendal lord—born to receive the admiring, true-hearted fealty of a true-hearted race; and as they became aware of the truth the old walls rang with the shouts of welcome from their loyal throats.

Lady Winifred's heart was brimful of romance, and, although her life had been spent amid the frivolities of fashionable society, she was passionately fond and proud of her native land—of "Erin's Green Isle." It was solely to gratify his only child that her father had returned to the castle, and it was with a face flushed with innocent pleasure that the young girl listened to this enthusiastic greeting from her father's tenantry.

She had dressed for the occasion with more care than if she had been going to a court ball, with an instinctive knowledge of the admiration of the rustic class for glistening silks and gleaming jewels; and very fair and flower-like looked the refined young face as it rose out of the cloud of pale blue and smiled acknowledgment to the cries of "Long Life to the fair Lady Winifred!" "Blessings on the pretty face!" "May the sun always shine for the like of ye!" and so on until every good wish in the calendar had been invoked upon her head.

During all this time Eileen had stood as one in a maze, the truth gradually dawning upon her that her fairy queen was veritable flesh and blood—even the young heiress, Lady Winifred, whom she had fancied to be far away in foreign lands.

The truth was that the very morning after Lady Winifred's arrival that impulsive young woman had donned her rich riding-habit, and, accompanied only by a groom, had ridden forth to obtain an idea of the country. Attracted by the picturesque look of a little *shealing*, which, almost hidden by roses, stood just the other side of the meadow, she had dismounted, given her attendant directions to ride on to the shelter of a group of trees, and await her there, while she went upon an investigating expedition to the cottage.

Eileen's mistake with regard to her identity had so well-suited her romantic nature that she had entered into the part allotted to her with keen enjoyment.

Now, however, she had another rôle to enact—that of peacemaker.

During the evening Eileen received a summons to a private interview with Lady Winifred, who received her with a beaming smile, and said,—

"I have invited you to my festival according to promise; and now I am going to make your heart light by reconciling you to your lover. Come in," and Lady Winifred went to the door connecting with another room, and motioned to a party waiting outside. It was Brian and his mother.

After they had entered, in obedience to their peremptory young lady's order, she said, turning to Bridget O'Connell,—

"I would like to signalise my coming home to the dear old castle by making a pair of true hearts happy. I will give this girl as much live stock as will match what your son has, and I will furnish her house, and give her a store of linen which will make her the envy of every farmer's wife around. What say you? Shall they make a match?"

"It's a fine offer, and worthy the pretty lips that said it. May you live long! and may your husband be worthy of you!"

Brian's eyes were fixed entreatingly upon Eileen.

Her face was averted.

He made an impulsive step towards her.

"Eileen, mavourneen!" he whispered, "can you forgive and forget?"

At the sound of his dear voice the blood

rose, and burned like a crimson rose in each round cheek; but still she made no reply.

Then the old mother went to her, and laid one skinny hand upon her slender wrist.

"Do not refuse to make my lad happy!" she said, humbly. "He's after breaking his heart this many a day for a kind look from the girl he loves! and many's the time I've sorely repented the share I've had in his trouble!"

Then Eileen turned to her lover.

"Ah!" she said, with a bright smile, "if I did not love you so dearly I would make believe a little longer; but I cannot. I am too glad!"

M. E. M.

## FACETIE.

TEACHER: "What is velocity?" Boy: "Velocity is whata man puts down a hot plate with."

"It's little things that tell," says a philosopher. Yes, doubtless; little brothers and sisters, for instance.

A FASHIONABLE girl's motto: "Never put off till to-morrow what you can get your mother to do to-day."

A PATIENT DOCTOR.—Uncle George: "Are you practising medicine, Henry?" Henry: "No, I'm practising patience."

WOMEN are now wearing undressed kid for their slippers, yet for ages they have been wearing their slippers on the undressed kid.

It is not generally desirable to have the market overstocked with any merchandise, but in bathing dresses everybody is glad of a surf fit.

SAID a leather merchant the other day: "If it didn't look like making game of the hide market I should say there's more hide than seek there now."

A WRITER says that the best cure for mange in dogs is gunpowder mixed with vinegar. Gunpowder mixed with shot is just as effective and works quicker.

SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHER: "Now tell me, what is duty?" Little West Ender (just back from abroad): "It's something you don't pay unless you have to."

THE BEST HE COULD DO.—Old Lady (to street gamin): "You don't chew tobacco, do you, little boy?" Little Boy: "No'm; but I kin give yer a cigarette."

HILL: "So Miss Gadabout is engaged. Jove! she's been engaged to every fool in the place, I think. Who's the last idiot she hooked?" Jinks: "Myself."

THE difference between a veterinary surgeon and a horse doctor is not palpable to some people, but it becomes very plain when the veterinary surgeon sends in his bill.

"Is it possible, Miss, that you don't know the names of some of your best friends?" "Certainly! I do not even know what my own may be in a year from this time."

MISTRESS (to new cook): "Bridget, the soup is quite cold. Didn't I tell you to warm the tureen?" Bridget: "Yis, mum; but shure an Oi thought the soup would warm it."

TRAMP No. 1: "I say, Jem, I've got a dandy new name for me old shoes. Call 'em corporations now." Tramp No. 2: "Fer why, me boy?" Tramp No. 1: "'Cause they've got no soles."

MERELY A SUGGESTION.—Blobson: "Dumpsey, what in the world do you suppose makes my boy so stupid?" Dumpsey: "I dunno. Have you ever read up any on the subject of heredity?"

MARRIED GROCER: "What's that the lady wants?" Clerk: "She wants me to weigh her baby for her." "All right; but say, tell her the youngster weighs about four pounds more than it does, or she'll swear our scales are doctored."

"That friend of yours is rather a disagreeable person, isn't he?" asked a gentleman of a humourist, who replied: "Well, I must say that he is usually as disagreeable as the circumstances will permit."

A SEASONABLE LUNCHEON.—Waiter: "Have soup to-day, sir?" De Frees: "Soup—are you mad? Just bring me a pitcher of lemonade and a fan; and, say—put my coat on ice while I wait, will you?"

ALGERNON (to his betrothed): "Belinda, my darling, nothing shall ever part us!" Belinda (who has just been reading accounts of divorce trials): "Ah! my love, and is it so? Shall nothing part us—not even marriage?"

MIRLAD.—Why didn't you get some eggs from the hens' nests this morning?" asked a farmer of his son, who answered: "Because there weren't any. If the hens laid any they mislaid 'em, so't they can't be found."

FAMILY SKELETONS.—"Ah, my friend," sighed a lugubrious stranger, at Brighton, "there are skeletons in all families. I have mine, and I s'pose you have yours?" "Yes, sir," was the reply; "she is down there on the beach now."

A FRENCH newspaper, the editor of which appears to affect English terms in speaking of racing matters, recently advised its readers to "bake" (back) a certain horse for no matter what sum. Its readers did so, and the "bakers" were "done brown."

"Why do you wink at me, sir?" said a beautiful young lady, angrily, to a stranger, at a party an evening or two since. "I beg your pardon, madam," replied the wit: "I wink as men do when looking at the sun—your splendour dazzled my eyes."

UNUSUAL PRESSURE.—Mrs. Van Prim: "I am astonished, Clara, that you should voluntarily allow Mr. Featherly to put his arm around you." Clara: "It wasn't exactly voluntary, mother; at least, considerable pressure was brought to bear upon me."

BEATING THE TELEGRAPH.—"Good-bye, wife; if I am detained by business, and not able to come home to dinner, I'll send you a telegram." Wife (tridgly): "You needn't take that trouble. Here it is. I took it out of your pocket a while ago."

SENSIBLE TO THE LAST.—Aunt: "Well, love, did Mr. McSiller propose?" Edith: "No, aunty; but he was on the verge of it, when—" Aunt: "When, what, darling?" Edith: "When the clock struck and reminded him that there was only time to catch the last cheap train, and he had a return ticket."

A BLUNT PHYSICIAN.—"Let me see your tongue, madam, please," said the doctor, and he added, facetiously, as the request was complied with: "It is not necessary to expose the entire length of it." The indignant patient drew in her tongue and gave the thoughtless young physician a piece of it.

AFTER THE OLD MAN KICKS.—Said a politician to his son: "Look at me! I began as an Alderman, and here I am at the top of the tree. And what is my reward? Why, when I die my son will be the greatest rascal outside of jail." To this the young hopeful remarked: "Yes, dad, when you die—not till then."

A POINTED REMARK.—"My speech took wonderfully well," said the stump orator, with undignified pride; "all my good points were recognized immediately." "Yes," was the reply of his cynical friend; "but then, you know, when you make a point, it stands out so prominently—like a mountain in a desert."

"HELLO, Jones, where have you been?" accosted Smith, as he met Jones with a basket, going up the street. "Been fishing." How many did you catch? "Didn't catch any." "What is that?" "Didn't catch a fish." Smith went over to Jones' father-in-law's house, and told him that Jones was wandering about the streets acting strangely, and talking in an incoherent manner, and that he had better look after him.

OLD LADY (to taxidermist): "You can see for yourself, man. You only stuffed my poor parrot in the summer, and here are his feathers tumbling out before your eyes." Taxidermist: "Lor' bless you, ma'am, that's the triumph of the art. We stuff 'em that natural that they moult in their proper season."

IRRITATED FRENCHMAN (to Englishman who has taken him for a waiter): "Sir-r, you haf gr-r-r-ously insulted me. There is my card. My seconds vill wait upon you, sir-r-r." Englishman: "Never mind your seconds, Frenchy. You can wait upon me just as well. Pass me the Worcester sauce, and be quick about it."

THE TIME FOR LOW PRICES.—A man went into a shop, the proprietor of which was a German. "How much do you ask for your sausages?" he inquired. "A shilling." "I can buy them for tenpence of Mr. —." "Vy you didn't, den?" "He was all out of them." "Oh, vell, I tell mine sausages for tenpence, doo, ven I was outd."

TIME FOR REGENERATION.—"Ah, how d'ye do, Charley?" "I'm not feeling well at all. The fact is, I haven't slept well lately, and then I've been eating too much hot bread and fried steak and green vegetables." "Oh, I see! you've been on your vacation." Well, cheer up, old man! you've got nearly a year ahead of you to recuperate."

A CAUTIOUS GIRL.—"Be my wife," he implored, "be my wife, my adored one. See! I have had my life insured for £1,000 in your favour," and he flourished the policy in the air. She pondered a moment; then, raising her large and lustrous orbs to his, she said: "Before I give you an answer I would like to know the state of your health."

IN THE SAME PREDICAMENT.—Kirby: "Lend me a fiver, will you old boy? I'm clean broke." Moxey: "That's a pretty good ring you wear. Why don't you lumber it?" Kirby: "Couldn't you know. It's a souvenir of a deceased brother." Moxey: "Well, my money is a souvenir of a deceased father. Day-day, old fel." And he walks off.

BENT EGGS.—A farmer was driving into the village with a pail of eggs between his knees. He had held the eggs in that position ever since leaving his farm-house in the suburbs. His waggon struck a bridge hard, the rocket-bolt snapped and down went man and eggs into the dust. Somebody asked him afterwards if he lost his eggs. "Oh, no," said he, "I only bent a few of 'em."

THE auctioneer had just sold a broken-down cook stove, and he inquired who had bought it: "Charge it to Mrs. Dee," called out a woman in the crowd. "Who's Mrs. D.?" asked the auctioneer. "I am," replied the woman. "Well, we don't know you. What's your full name? Mrs. D. ain't enough. How do you spell it?" "D-e-e," she repeated, slowly, and the auctioneer fell off the box.

IT MADE HIM A LITTLE VEXED.—"Adolphus, d'ye know that I'm a little vexed at Miss Simmons?" "What happened, Arthur, old boy?" "Well, you know I pride myself on my singing. We were at the piano. 'I'll sing one more song and then go home,' I said. 'Was it late?' 'About midnight.' 'And what did she say?' She said, 'Can't you go home first?' 'And did you?' 'Yes, Adolphus. I tell you I'm a little vexed about it.'"

A WICKED GROCER.—A wicked grocer played a trick on a "fussy" woman of his vicinity. She had bought of him a barrel of flour that was not of her favourite brand. The flour didn't suit. It was heavy, coarse, black, sticky, and wouldn't rise. The grocer, whose opinion of the flour was different from that of the lady, carted it back, took off the head of the barrel and replaced it with the head of an empty one that had held the lady's favourite kind, and sent the same barrel, thus "doctored," back to her. It suited to a charm that time.



## SOCIETY.

ROYAL betrothals are coming on thick and fast—one leading to another—and by the time the Empress Frederick's daughters and a few Crown Princes have pledged their hearts and hands all round, the whole fashionable world will be astir respecting the various trousseaux. With so many Princesses sending to Paris for their best things, leading *couturiers* will find enough to do in eclipsing each other for the next twelve months, and this agreeable prospect promises a welcome change in those illustrations and diagrams which teach the better part of creation how to dress.

LIFE at Homburg has been greatly improved by the introduction of new fashions by the Prince of Wales. Dinners are no longer arbitrarily fixed in every "Kur" for five o'clock, but are served at the hour which most suits the guests. The old rule, which forbade the giving or accepting of hospitality has been broken down. Of old, if you were invited to dinner it meant that your host simply selected his guests, seated them at the table, and superintended the *menu*, each guest having the privilege of paying for his own meal. Now this is no longer the case, but during the period when this change was taking place some very funny scenes were witnessed.

KING MILAN, *Modern Society* thinks, will find his Queen no mean antagonist in the diplomatic game he has forced her to play. His first move on learning last week that Nathalie was coming to Roumania with the intention of reaching Belgrade from Turn Severin by boat, and appearing in person before the consistory on the day of the trial (as the laws require), was to order his Ministers to prevent her landing, if necessary, by force. M. Cristioh, and three other members of the Cabinet, upon this promptly threatened to resign. They pointed out that the Queen would excite great sympathy by her plea that she only came in obedience to the law, and such a high-handed action might provoke serious disturbances. Milan, beaten at this point, now wants the Queen to send her statement to him in Tyrol, and offers to prepare a statement in reply, and so the game goes on.

SINCE the Empress of China has resigned the cares of State, and taken up her abode at the Western Palace, it appears she has been having quite a gay old time of it. Her favourite amusement is a game something akin to "catch who catch can," but which rejoices in the unpronounceable name of *Mon Leirh*; it is played after dark, and without any lights being introduced into the large and lofty saloon which the Empress selects for the purpose. It may be imagined that a grand scrimmage is the result, in which the ex-ruler of the Celestial Empire joins with as hearty scampering, shouting, and pouncing out upon the intended prey, as the youngest of Her Majesty's attendants.

SIR ALGERNON and Lady Borthwick have had a big house party at Invercauld; the Duc de Chartres and Prince Esterhazy were among the guests, last week, and sport was pretty good. The Duke has also had some tolerable shooting at Loch Kennard, where his fair (and sturdy) relative accompanied him, and did her part in bagging nineteen brace of grouse and four hares. The Comtesse de Paris is in fine form this autumn, and keener after the rather masculine pastimes than ever.

PRINCESS SOPHIA of Prussia is the first of Queen Victoria's granddaughters who seems likely to wear a crown at some time or other. Her illustrious grandmother has always been strangely indifferent to great matches for the girls. The marriage of the Princess Royal may have enlightened her Majesty as to the difficulties which beset an exalted position in a strange country, and she never afterwards looked out a really grand party for a son-in-law.

## STATISTICS.

CRIME IN IRELAND.—The report on the criminal and judicial statistics of Ireland for 1887 has been published. It appears from the report that there has been a slight increase in the total number of criminal offences in Ireland in 1887 as compared with 1886. The improvement as regards the more serious offences—those not determined summarily, noted in the reports from 1882 to 1885, but which received a slight check in 1886, is again observable, the number for last year showing a substantial decrease as compared with the number in 1886, and being both absolutely and in proportion to the population, the lowest for any of the last nine years, and much below the average for that period. The number of the less serious offences was in 1887 somewhat in excess of that for 1886, but compares favourably with the average for the last ten years. The judicial returns present no change of importance. The 226,041 criminal offences in Ireland in 1887 were distributed as follows in the four provinces: Leinster, 91,302, or at the rate of 713.9 per 10,000 of the population; Munster, 52,291, or 392.9 per 10,000; Ulster, 57,465, or 329.7 per 10,000; and Connaught, 24,982, or 303.9 per 10,000. Leinster shows as compared with 1886 an increase of 3.1 per 10,000; Munster a decrease of 15.7 per 10,000; Ulster an increase of 18.4 per 10,000; and Connaught an increase of 16.3 per 10,000. The indictable offences not disposed of summarily were 6,378, as against 7,315 in 1886. The number of persons tried summarily under the Criminal Law and Procedure Act up to the end of the year was 626, of whom 213 were discharged, and 415 convicted. The cost of the repression of crime in the year was £2,081,117, against £2,039,025 in 1886.

## GEMS.

SEARCH not who spoke this or that, but mark what is spoken.

EXPERIENCE is a much more valuable jewel than consistency.

THE absence of good talk is frankness, mutual trust, and the desire to be at one with your companions for the time.

MISTAKES in life are like mile stones on the highway—we can make no use of them until we are abreast of or past them.

THE spirit of conciliation puts peace, love, and harmony far above trifles; it buries petty selfishness, it inflicts no unnecessary wounds, it lends a courtesy and grace to actions, a charm to presence, a dignity to character, and a never-failing spring of happiness to life.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TO BOIL ONIONS.—Put twelve onions in one gallon of water; let them boil, but not too hard. If the water becomes yellow, pour it off and add as much more boiling water; put a little salt in the water each time. If the onions are green, they will take two hours, and a little longer if dried. Serve them with drawn butter sauce.

TOFFEE.—Take one breakfast-cupful of rich cream (if slightly sour it would be just as good, or better), one breakfast-cupful of pounded white sugar, pour the above into a very clean copper saucepan, and boil slowly over a clear but not too hot fire. The mixture will first become quite liquid, and will afterwards gradually thicken; when almost done pour in one dessertspoonful of essence of vanilla and one of whisky. When the mixture becomes very frothy, and leaves the sides of the pan clean, pour it out as quickly as possible on to a flat buttered dish. It should set at once.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

UNTRUTHFUL PROTESTATIONS.—About the formal termination of our letters there is much untruth. Formality is doubtless always more or less false; but it seems a pity and a mistake that civilization should prompt us to utter falsehoods. Seeing, then, that very frequently not one of these affectionate phrases have an atom of truth in them, would it not do just as well to terminate with the name of the writer and a greeting, the same as though we had met our acquaintance in the street? Face to face no one would pretend to talk such nonsense. Fancy such a thing as telling half-a-dozen men that we were truly theirs, and a dozen others that we were ever theirs sincerely, and our receiving similar protestations every time we met. Foreigners kissing and hugging in the streets would be nothing to it. Yet we write the nonsense we should be above expressing verbally. What we think to be necessary politeness in a letter we should consider ridiculous formality, and an absurd parade of words if they were exchanged in person.

DO MONKEYS THROW STONES?—"As I approached the landlip I saw a number of brown monkeys rush to the sides and across the top of the alip, and presently pieces of loosened stone and shale came tumbling down where I stood. I fully satisfied myself that this was not merely accidental, for I distinctly saw one monkey industriously, with both fore-paws, and with obvious malice prepense, pushing the loose shingle off the rock. I then tried the effect of throwing stones at them, and this made them quite angry, and the number of fragments which they set rolling was speedily doubled. This, though it does not amount to the actual throwing of stones by monkeys as a means of offence, comes very near to the same thing, and makes me think there may be truth in the stories of their throwing stones at people from trees. At all events, the general statement that the act of throwing things is never performed by any animal except man is not correct, as I have myself seen recently captured elephants project branches of trees with the design of hitting people out of their reach."

SHOPPING IN PARIS.—An American lady, sojourning in Paris, is delighted with the perfect manner in which one is always waited upon there. "As you enter there is always a most polite salutation from the floor-walker, and on leaving a 'Je vous salue, madame.' The clerks never show you dissatisfied faces, nor is anything too much trouble for them to do for you. A feeling that you are conferring the greatest possible favour on them by honouring their establishment with your patronage is most agreeable, and although very truly this may be said to be only 'lip service,' still it encourages one to buy and return; whereas, in some places in our incomparable city of New York, for instance, should a clerk not have exactly what you may ask for in his stock, a 'Haven't got it' is all the satisfaction you receive from him, and never a good-morning is granted you, or even a bend of the head. But this politeness shown to customers in Parisian establishments, shops and restaurants is frequently misunderstood by people making their first visit abroad. I recall one instance where I was invited to lunch with some American friends at the Café de Paris. As the gentleman of the party stepped up to the *caisse*, which is invariably occupied by a respectable looking and neatly-dressed woman, to pay his bill, the cashier, thanking him, turned her head and wished madame and mademoiselle good morning. My friends—and, by the way, they well enough in their behaviour at home—made no acknowledgment of this politeness, and, as soon as we reached the pavement, they exclaimed, with one voice, 'What impertinence!' and only a full explanation of this custom would smooth down their ruffled plumage."

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

W. E. G.—Peter Cooper died in New York city on April 4, 1882, aged 92.

H. A. H.—Write to the publisher himself. You will find the address in the Directory.

L. LEICESTER.—1. You are probably neat, and thoughtful of others rather than yourself. 2. Fair.

N. A. MARTINEAU.—You seem rather self-possessed, and probably really kind-hearted. 2. Moderate.

HOUSE TENANT.—You must consult a Writer to the Signet. We regret we are not sufficiently acquainted with Scotch law to assist you.

B. W. H.—The second city in the empire, in point of population, is Bombay, with over 800,000 inhabitants; Glasgow is third, with over 700,000.

BLOSSOM.—You must judge of his feelings towards you by his conduct when you are alone with him. He may have engagements at the other time.

L. C. P.—The game of dominoes has been traced by some authors to the Greeks, Hebrews, and Chinese. It was introduced into France from Italy about the middle of the last century.

A. B.—Under the circumstances which you describe your own escort was certainly entitled to the preference, and you should have asked him to accompany you, instead of requesting the other gentleman to do so.

A. A.—To make chicken tea, cut up a fowl in small pieces; put it into an earthen vessel, with some salt and three pints of water; let it boil three hours, strain it, set it to cool six or eight hours, then take off the fat. The tea will be like a jelly.

A. N. C.—You need the services of a regular and experienced practitioner, but we cannot recommend any particular one. If practicable, select one in your own immediate vicinity, so as to have the benefit of his personal and frequent attention.

LIVY.—Your handwriting and composition are fair. We do not see why a farmer should be judged by a lower standard than that which is applied to other men. His opportunities for self-improvement are better than those of most other hardworking men.

ELLEN.—1. There would be no impropriety in extending a call to the party referred to if it were understood that it would be agreeable to him or her to accept it. 2. One of the other must make the first call, with the understanding that it will be duly returned.

A. A. D.—"Spare the rod and spoil the child" is as applicable now as in the days of Solomon, but the adage need not be applied literally. Find out what is a real punishment to the child, and apply it with moderation. Much depends on the natural disposition and early training he has received.

C. C.—Under ordinary circumstances it would be much better to let a mistake in grammar pass unnoticed than to correct it in public. If a friend uses a form of expression which seems to you incorrect, you would be doing him or her a favour by drawing attention to it afterwards in private.

F. N. R.—The first wedding anniversary is called cotton; second, paper; third, leather; fifth, wooden; seventh, woollen; tenth, tin; twelfth, silk and fine linen; fifteenth, crystal; twentieth, china; twenty-fifth, silver; thirtieth, pearl; fortieth, ruby; fiftieth, golden; seventieth, diamond.

P. Z.—The course taken by the young lady should not be resorted to under ordinary circumstances. It would have been better to have waited until an opportunity occurred of speaking to her friend in the church, or even to have written a short and frank note, acknowledging that the wrong was chiefly on her side, and asking that her apologies be accepted.

L. L. T.—Let the young man show a little more enterprise. It is his place to do the wooing, and until you are sought you are debared by custom and the modesty natural to your sex from showing too great a desire for his company and attentions. If you are discreet he will soon find a way to make himself agreeable to you. Invite him to call when a proper occasion offers.

W. V. S.—If you were to let the young lady entirely alone for a few months she would probably come to a positive decision in the matter. Your fear that she is trying to make a fool of you may have some foundation in fact, but her indignation when she heard that you had shown a little courtesy to another girl proves that she is not entirely indifferent to your attentions.

W. A.—Charles Dickens was born at Landport, a suburb of Portsmouth, on the 7th February, 1812; he died at Gadshill, near Rochester, on June 9, 1870, in his fifty-eighth year, of an effusion of the brain, the result of overwork. Opinions differ as to which of his works is the best. Probably, if the questions could be put to the vote, "David Copperfield" would receive a majority.

S. VERRÉ is an ignorant, pretentious upstart, who has got to acquire the first elements of good breeding. In all civilized society the man who runs down, or in unfriendly manner criticises the fare and appointments of a table at which he is permitted to sit as a guest, is looked upon as an ungentlemanly fellow, and he soon finds respectable social circles closed against him. And a man who is so wanting in self-respect and in common decency as to boast of being kissed by ladies, giving names and dates, ought to be banished to some land—if such a desolate land there be—where he would never meet even a single solitary member of the angelic sisterhood.

S. J.—The clovers, sometimes improperly called grasses, are botanically arranged under the same head with the bean, pea, locust, &c. More than 120 species of clover have, it is said, been described by naturalists. Their properties and characteristics are totally unlike the grasses, with which they agree only in their contributing in a similar manner to the support of farm stock.

S. M. C.—Dragoman is an oriental word signifying interpreter. It is applied, in the Ottoman Empire and the courts of the farther East and of Barbary, to men who know several languages, and act as interpreters between foreigners and the natives. At Constantinople the office of prime dragoman, through whom the Sultan receives the communications of Christian ambassadors is one of the most important of the government.

V. V.—You are not called upon to do anything, nor is there any need for anxiety on your part. Two weeks is not a very long time, and the young man may have been kept from calling on you by various things which demanded his attention. Should he not call in a month or so, or send you some word, you would have reason to suppose that he was staying away on purpose, and then it would probably be well for you to let him stay.

DORA S.—Lichens have no roots, but live on air, and fasten themselves to almost everything where dryness and moisture can be found. They are found all over the world; on the rocks of newly-formed islands, in the ocean, and on the summits of the highest mountains. They are sometimes called rock moss and tree moss; but they are not mosses, which have separate stems and leaves. Lichens grow where nothing else can grow.

C. D.—It would be almost impossible to make a satisfactory arrangement of cardinal red, gold, blue, and brown; and even if you did combine such colours successfully by using very deep, rich shades, as is done in some Egyptian decoration, the result would be so striking as to spoil the effect of any pictures hung on the walls. Strong colours are difficult to manage. Try plain olive green walls, and quiet colours all over your room.

## FORGIVING AND FORGETTING.

THERE is enough in daily life—

A life so much beset

With crosses harsh and cruel words—

To pardon and forget;

But there is nothing we can spare

That's loving, comforting and fair.

And there are times that always bring

Some trials for their train—

Some hope or confidence betrayed,

Some injury or pain,

That when forgiven we will yet

Find it harder to forget.

But with these troubles and these wrongs,

There are few days that we,

By kindly nature, are not brought,

Some friendly deed to see—

Some word that comes to cheer us still,

Some smile to lighten what is ill!

These are the comforters that break

Like sunbeams on our eyes,

To be remembered all our days

In thankful memories.

While we forgive whatever annoys,

In gratitude for present joys!

D. B. W.

A. C.—Both were in the wrong. The father's conduct was absurd and tyrannical in the highest degree, and he deserved all the punishment he received. The son was right in taking away the stick, and in defending himself against the old man's ridiculous attack. But to strike his father after he had disarmed him was entirely unjustifiable. It was an impious action. No degree of provocation on the father's part could begin to justify it.

R. P. W.—For a man of only few opportunities for reading and inquiry, mythology, in the present state of the science, is one of the least profitable studies possible. The foundations of a sound science on the subject can only be said to be just laid, and no one is the better for filling the mind with the confused, silly stories gathered from the legends of many different nations, and changed according to the caprice of second-rate Greek and Latin poets, which make up the Dictionaries of Mythology.

C. C. W.—If both men fired at all the birds which rose within range, and if all the conditions of weather, ground, dogs, and birds were equal, the trial resulted in favour of the second man, because he killed with over 66 per cent. of his shots, while the first only killed with 56 per cent. of his. It is quite possible, however, that the second man was more cautious and only took comparatively easy shots, so that the test, as described by you, is insufficient to determine the relative skill of the two sportsmen.

A. E.—Tennis is a game of great antiquity, being taken from a similar game played by the Greeks and Romans. Under the name of *pauine* (given to it from the ball being at that time struck with the palm of the hand), it is noticed in the earlier records of King Arthur. It was very popular during the fifteenth century among the French, and about this time the use of a heavy glove to protect the hand in striking the ball was introduced, and a further improvement was subsequently made by the adoption of the racket. Many modifications have been introduced, but the legitimate descendant of the *pauine* and tennis of former days is the present game of racket, which is played in an almost identical manner. The modern game of lawn-tennis is a greatly modified form of that described above.

W. S. M.—1. Scattered along the coast of Ireland are 193 islands, the coast line being about 750 miles long. 2. Ireland has ninety harbours, fourteen of which receive ships of any draught. There are also numerous inlets which afford a shelter to the largest fishing craft. 3. The lighthouses number 62, of which twenty-six are first class. 4. The principal ports of entry are Cork, Dublin, Belfast, Waterford, Limerick, Londonderry, and Newry. 5. By far the most extensive market for Irish products is Great Britain.

R. W. V.—Daniel Lambert, the English giant, was born in Leicester, March 13, 1760, and died in Stamford, June 21, 1809. His parents were not of an unusual size. It was in his 19th year that he began to grow large, and in 1793 he weighed 448 pounds. He was 5 feet 11 inches high, and at his death he weighed 739 pounds. He measured 9 feet 4 inches round the body, and 3 feet 1 inch round the leg. He never drank any beverage but water, slept less than eight hours a day, and participated in the sports of the field until a few years of his death.

B. T.—1. London was no "city under the ground." You probably got your idea from the number of tunnels which have been built and are in course of construction under London Bridge. One of the new tunnels, known as the Thames Subway, is twenty-five feet below the bed of the river, and is remarkable for its dryness, though the temperature is high. The omnibus runs upon a railway of two feet six inches gauge, and is lighted by coils, or cabbage seed oil lamps, as are also the lifts or elevators, and the waiting-room. 2. Your handwriting is fair for a girl of sixteen.

JACK—"I am a young man, just twenty years of age, and feel a very particular desire to own a house. Unfortunately, however, I do not possess the means of buying one. Can you put me up to any way of buying a house without money?" We cannot. With regard to your going as a reporter for a newspaper, we may just say, that when events shall be transpiring on the Continent of sufficient importance to warrant the sending out of special correspondents, the individuals selected for that purpose will be practised hands, not young gentlemen afflicted with a desire to go abroad without paying for it.

R. G. G.—Receptacles for holding waste paper or a piece of handwork can be made from a small-sized Japanese parasol, half-opened, and kept out by means of a wire run along inside, and a bright ribbon twisted in and out and round each other point outside. The top is fixed into a small stand of black or vermilion painted wood, and the handle, which is uppermost, is bound over with coloured satin or velvet ribbon, finished off with a cluster of hanging loops, and an artificial bird or spray of grass and feathers to one side. A fall of lace is sometimes added, or a hanging pompon from every alternate point. These small-sized coloured paper parasols can be varied in colour, in the shape of stand, and mode of trimming. For bazaar they sell very well.

MATTHEW.—There is hardly any branch of study which, if thoroughly pursued, will not benefit the mind. But you should confine your intellectual pursuits, for the most part, to subjects connected with the position whereby you earn your bread, if you wish to become eminent. There are many works on agriculture, soils, drainage, fertilizers, "rural economy," stock raising, growth of trees, and so forth, which will do for solid reading. And then there are works on landscape gardening, horticulture, flower raising, grape growing, and various other ornamental and profitable branches of industry, which will answer for lighter reading, although any of them, if properly studied, will furnish nourishment for the mind. At the present day, the science and literature of farming are so extensive that if you thoroughly master them you will be a very bright and intelligent man.

L. S. P.—The disease formerly called sweating sickness has often prevailed extensively in Europe and Asia, especially during the middle ages, and still frequently appears in Turkey and other parts of Europe and Asia. It is now called military fever, sudatoria, and miliaria, and is defined as "an eruption of innumerable minute pimples with white summits, occurring in successive crops upon the skin of the trunk and extremities, preceded and accompanied with fever, oppression of respiration, and copious sweats of a fetid odour peculiar to the disease. The base of the pimples and the skin around are red and irritable." The disease appeared in England in 1485, and disappeared the next year. It appeared again in 1696, 1817, 1828, and in 1857. There is no agreement as to its specific nature. The treatment consists in cooling drinks, light diets, and frequent laving and sponging of the cutaneous surface.

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